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THE DRONE

AND OTHER PLAYS

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THE DRONE
AND OTHER PLAYS
By Rutherford Mayne

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TO

T. P. GILL

This collection of plays is gratefully dedicated

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THE DRONE

TO

SEVEEN

CHARACTERS

JOHN MURRAY, *A farmer.*

DANIEL MURRAY, *His brother.*

MARY MURRAY, *John's daughter.*

ANDREW MCMINN, *A farmer.*

SARAH MCMINN, *His sister.*

DONAL MACKENZIE, *A Scotch engineer.*

SAM BROWN, *A labourer in John Murray's employment.*

KATE, *A servant girl in John Murray's employment.*

ALICK MCCREADY, *A young farmer.*

The action takes place throughout in the kitchen of John Murray in the County of Down.

TIME ..... *The present day.*

THE DRONE

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

ACT I.

SCENE: *The farm kitchen of John Murray. It is large and spacious, with a wide open fire-place to the right. At the back is one door leading to the parlour and other rooms in the house, also a large window overlooking the yard outside. To the left of this window is the door leading into the yard. Opposite to the fire-place on the left side is another door leading into Daniel Murray's workshop, and beside this door is a large dresser with crockery, &c. At the back beneath the window is a table near which* KATE, *the servant, a slatternly dressed girl of some thirty years of age or more, is seated. She is carefully examining some cakes of soda bread, and has a bucket beside her into which she throws the rejected pieces.*

KATE. That one's stale. It would break your teeth to eat it. (*She throws the cake into the bucket.*) And the mice have nibbled that one. And there's another as bad. (*She throws both pieces into the bucket.*)

(BROWN, *the servant man, opens the door from yard and enters. He is elderly, and with a pessimistic expression of face, relieved somewhat by the sly humour that is in his eyes. He walks slowly to the centre of the kitchen, looks at* KATE, *and then turns his eyes, with a disgusted shake of the head, towards the dresser as if searching for something.*)

BROWN. Well! Well! Pigs get fat and men get lean in this house.

KATE. It's you again, is it ? And what are you looking now ?

BROWN. I'm looking a spanner for the boss. The feedboard to the threshing machine got jammed just when halfway through the first stack, and he is in a lamentable temper.

KATE (*uneasily*). Is he ?

BROWN (*watching her slyly to see what effect his words have*). And he's been grumbling all morning about the way things is going on in this house. *Bread* and things wasted and destroyed altogether.

KATE. Well, it's all Miss Mary's fault. I told her about this bread yesterday forenoon, and she never took any heed to me.

BROWN. Miss Mary ? (*With a deprecatory shake of his head.*) What does a slip of a girl like that know about housekeeping and her not home a year from the school in the big town, and no mother or anybody to train her. (*He stares in a puzzled way at the dresser.*) I don't see that spanner at all. Did you see it, Kate ?

KATE. No. I've more to do than look for spanners.

BROWN (*gazing reproachfully at her and then shaking his head*). It's a nice house, right enough. (*Lowering his voice.*) And I suppose old Mr. Dan is never up yet. I was told by Johnny McAndless, he was terrible full last night at McArns and talking—ach—the greatest blethers about this new invention of his.

KATE. Do you say so ?

BROWN. Aye. No wonder he's taking a lie this morning. (*He peeps into the door of the workshop.*) He's not in his wee workshop ?

KATE. No. Miss Mary is just after taking up his breakfast to him.

BROWN. Some people get living easy in this world. (*He gives a last look at the dresser.*) Well divil a spanner can I see. I'll tell the master that. (*He goes out again through the yard door, and as he does so,* MARY MURRAY *comes through the door from the inner rooms, carrying a*

tray with teacups, &c., on it. She is a pretty, vivacious girl about eighteen years of age.)

MARY. Who was that?

KATE. It's the servant man looking for a spanner for your father, Miss Mary. There's something gone wrong with the threshing machine.

MARY (*taking the tray to the table and starting to get ready to wash up the cups*). I do believe sometimes that Uncle Dan's a lazy man.

KATE (*assisting her at the washing and stopping as if astonished at the statement*). And is it only now you're after finding that out! Sure the whole countryside knowed it this years and years.

MARY (*sharply*). The whole countryside has no business to talk about what doesn't concern it.

KATE. Oh, well, people are bound to talk, Miss.

MARY. But then Uncle Dan is awfully clever. He's got the whole brains of the Murrays, so father says, and then, besides that, he is a grand talker.

KATE. Aye. He can talk plenty. Sure Sarah McMinn, that lives up the Cut, says its a shame the way he's going on this twenty years and more, never doing a hand's turn from morning to night, and she says she wonders your poor father stands him and his nonsense.

MARY. Who said that?

KATE Sarah McMinn told Johnny McAndless that yesterday.

MARY. Sarah McMinn? Pooh! That hard, mean, old thing. No. I believe in Uncle Dan and so does father. He'll make a name for himself yet.

KATE. Well, it's getting near time he done it.

MARY. They say that Sarah McMinn just keeps her brother in starvation, and she just says nasty things like that about Uncle Dan because he doesn't like her.

KATE. Aye. He never did like people as seen through him, not but she is a mean old skin-a-louse. (*The voice of* DANIEL MURRAY *is heard calling from within.*) He's up, Miss.

MARY. Are you up, uncle ?

(DAN MURRAY *opens the door from the inner apartments and comes into the kitchen. He is carelessly dressed and sleepy-looking as if just out of bed, wears a muffler and glasses, and appears to be some fifty years of age.*)

DANIEL. Yes. Did the *Whig* come yet ?

MARY. Yes. I put it in your workshop.

DANIEL (*glancing at the clock*). Bless my heart, it's half-past one !

MARY (*reproachfully*). It is, indeed, uncle.

DANIEL. Well ! Well ! Time goes round, Mary. Time goes round. (KATE *picks up the bucket and goes out by the yard door.*) Where's your father ? (*He crosses over to the workshop door.*)

MARY. He's out working with Sam Brown at the threshing all morning since seven o'clock.

DANIEL. Well ! Well ! A very industrious man is John Murray. Very. But lacking in brains, my dear—lacking in brains. Kind, good-hearted, easy-going, but—ah ! well, one can't help these things. (*He goes into the workshop and brings out the paper and crosses back to sit down at the fire-place.*)

MARY. You were very late coming in last night, uncle.

DANIEL (*uneasily*). Eh ? (*He settles down in an arm-chair and opens out the paper.*)

MARY. I heard you coming in, and the clock was just after striking two.

DANIEL. Well—I met a few friends last night. Appreciative friends I could talk to, and I was explaining that new idea of mine that I've been working at so long—that new idea for a fan-bellows. It's a great thing. Oh yes. It should be. I sat up quite a while last night, thinking it over, and I believe I've got more ideas about it—better ones.

MARY. Do you think you'll make money off it, uncle ?

DANIEL. Mary—if it comes off—if I can get someone to take it up, I believe 'twill make our fortune, I do.

MARY. Oh, uncle, it would be lovely if you did, and

I would just die to see that nasty McMinn woman's face when she hears about you making such a hit.

DANIEL. McMinn? Has that woman been sneering about me again? That's one woman, Mary, I can't stand. I can never do myself justice explaining ideas in company when that woman is present.

MARY. Never mind her, uncle. (*Coming close beside him.*) Do you mind this time last year, uncle, when you went up to Belfast for a week to see about that patent for—what's this the patent was, uncle?

DANIEL (*uncomfortably*). Last year? This time?

MARY. Yes. Don't you remember you said you knew of an awfully nice boy that you met, and you were going to bring him down here.

DANIEL. Upon my soul, I had clean forgotten. Yes, yes. I think I did say something about a young fellow I met.

MARY. Was he nice, uncle?

DANIEL (*becoming absorbed in the newspaper*). Eh? I think so. Oh. He was—very nice chap.

MARY. Well, you said he was coming here to see me, and he never turned up yet.

DANIEL. Did I? Very possibly. I suppose he must have forgotten.

MARY (*walking away to the left and then back again pouting*). I'm sick of the boys here. There's only Alick McCready that's anyway passable. When will you see him again, uncle?

DANIEL. Well—possibly, when I go up to town again. Very soon, perhaps. That is if your father, Mary, can spare the money.

MARY (*thoughtfully*). I don't know, uncle. You see that would be five times now, and somehow you never seem to get anything done. That's what he said, mind you, uncle.

DANIEL (*mournfully*). Well! Well! To think of me toiling and moiling away in that workshop of mine, day after day, and week after week, and year after year—and there's all the thanks you get for it.

MARY. Uncle ?

DANIEL (*somewhat irritably as he gets engrossed reading*). Well ?

MARY. Look, if you went up to Belfast again soon, won't you see that boy ? I wonder what he's like. (*She gets close beside her uncle and nestles beside him.*) Is he dark or fair ?

DANIEL. Yes, yes. I think so.

MARY. Dark ?

DANIEL. Yes. I believe he is dark.

MARY. And tall ?

DANIEL (*trying vainly to read in spite of the interruptions*). Very tall.

MARY. Oh, how nice ! And uncle, is he good-looking ?

DANIEL. Very. Fine looking fellow.

MARY. That's grand ; and uncle, is he well to do ?

DANIEL. He has every appearance of it.

MARY. Oh you dear old uncle ! (*She nestles closer to him.*) But maybe he would'nt look at me when he has a whole lot of town girls to go with.

DANIEL. My dear niece, you don't know what a very good-looking young lady you are, and besides he saw your photograph.

MARY. Which photograph ?

DANIEL (*perplexed*). Which photograph ? Your own of course !

MARY. The one I got taken at Lurgan ?

DANIEL. Yes. I think so.

MARY. Oh uncle ! That horrid thing ! Why didn't you show him the one I got taken at Newcastle ?

DANIEL. My mistake. Very sorry, indeed, Mary, I assure you. But I tell you, I'll take the album with me next time. Will that do ?

MARY (*laughing*). There. Now you're joking. (*Suddenly.*) What do you do all the time you stay in Belfast, uncle ?

DANIEL (*uneasily*). Um—um——Business, my dear girl, business. See engineers and all that sort of thing,

and talk things over. It takes time, you know, Mary, time.

MARY. You've been an awful long time inventing, uncle, haven't you?

DANIEL. Well, you know, Mary dear—time—it takes time. You can't rush an inventor.

MARY. Well look, uncle. You know I can just wheedle father round my wee finger, can't I?

DANIEL. You can indeed.

MARY. Well, look: if you promise to bring down this boy you are talking about, I'll get father to give you enough to have two weeks in Belfast. There. It's a bargain.

DANIEL. Um—well—he may not be there you know.

MARY (*disappointed*). O uncle!

DANIEL. You see he travels a lot and he may be away. He may be in London. In fact I think—yes. He said he would be going to London.

MARY. Then why not go to London?

DANIEL (*starting up and speaking as if struck with delight at the possibility*). Eh? I never thought of that! (*He collapses again.*) But no. Your father, Mary. He would never give me the money. No.

MARY. But you're more likely to meet people there who'd take it up, aren't you, uncle?

DANIEL. It's *the place* for an inventor to go, Mary. *The place.* (*Pauses.*) But I'm afraid when John hears about it——(*he becomes very dubious and shakes his head*).

MARY. Well, look here, uncle. Do you mind the last time when he would not give you money to go up to Belfast about your patent.

DANIEL (*sadly*). I do.

MARY. You remember you got a letter a few days after asking you to come up at once and you had to go then. Hadn't you?

DANIEL. I had.

MARY. Well, couldn't we do the same this time?

DANIEL (*looking at her uneasily*). Eh?

MARY. Couldn't we get someone to send a letter. (*Pausing and thinking, then suddenly*). Oh, the very thing! You know that silly Alick McCready that comes running after me. Well, look, I'll get him to send a letter.

DANIEL. No good, my dear. I did it before——I mean letters on plain notepaper don't carry much weight. No.

MARY. What about——oh, I know! Uncle, a telegram!

DANIEL. Great idea! It is in soul!

MARY. And we'll put something on it like "come to London at once to see about the patent," or something like that. And he'd have to let you go then.

DANIEL. Mary, you're really a cleverer girl than your father thinks. (*Musingly.*) Two weeks in London.

MARY. And don't forget the nice boy, uncle, when you go.

DANIEL. I'll do my best to get hold of him.

MARY. No. I want a good definite promise. Promise, uncle.

DANIEL. Well, really you know, my dear, he——

MARY. Uncle, promise.

DANIEL. Um——well, I promise.

MARY. You're a dear old thing. You see, uncle, I don't want to marry Alick McCready or Jim McDowell or any of those boys, unless there's nobody else.

DANIEL. Quite right, my dear, quite right. Two weeks in London. Splendid! But it's time I was going into my workshop. (*He rises and takes the paper with him.*) I must really try and do something this morning. (*Exit by workshop door.*)

MARY (*calling after him*). You won't forget, uncle? Will you?

DANIEL. No, certainly not.

MARY. I do hope uncle brings that nice boy. Dark—tall—well set up—well to do.

(KATE *comes in again through the yard door, and looks at* MARY, *who is gazing vacantly into space.*)

KATE. Well? What notion have you got now?

MARY. Oh! just think, Kate! How would you like a boy who was dark and tall, and well set up and well to do?

KATE. I'd just leap at him.

MARY (*laughing*). I think I will—if he comes.

KATE. I think you've plenty on hand to manage. (BROWN *opens the yard door and resumes his old position from which he stares at the dresser*). You're back again, are you?

BROWN. Aye.

KATE. What ails you now?

BROWN. I'm looking the spanner.

MARY. The spanner?

BROWN. The spanner, Miss Mary. It's for turning the nuts like.

KATE. Have you never got it yet?

BROWN. Do you think I've got eyes in the back of my head? Underneath the seat, beside the salt-box, on the right near the wee crock in the left hand corner. (*He makes a movement to open one of the drawers of the dresser.*)

KATE. Will you get out of that, ignorance. It's not there.

BROWN (*with an appealing look at* MARY). Maybe its in the parlour?

MARY. Well, I'll take a look round. (*She goes through the door to living rooms.*)

BROWN (*mysteriously*). Did you hear the news?

KATE. No. (*Very much interested.*) What?

BROWN. Ach! You women never know anything.

KATE. What's the news? Somebody killed?

BROWN. No. More serious.

KATE (*alarmed*). God bless me! What is it?

BROWN. Andy McMinn has a sister.

KATE (*disappointed*). Ach! Sure I knowed that years ago.

BROWN. And she's trying to get a man.

KATE. Well. I knowed that this years.

BROWN. And Mr. John Murray is a widow man.

KATE. You mean to be telling me that Mr. John has a notion of that old thing? Go long with you!

BROWN. Did you ever hear tell of a widow man that never got married again.

KATE. Plenty. Don't come in here talking blethers.

BROWN. Whist. There's more in what I'm telling you than you think. And I'll hold you to a shilling that Sarah McMinn will be Mrs. John Murray before one month.

KATE. Who told you?

BROWN! Ach. You've no more head than a yellow yorling. Where has Mr. John been going to these wheen of nights?

KATE (*thinking*). Andy McMinns!

BROWN. Aye. Do you think it is to see old Andy? And sure he's been talking to me all morning about the way the house is being kept. No hand to save the waste; bread and things destroyed; hens laying away; eggs ate up by the dozen and chickens lost and one thing and another. And hinting about what money a good saving woman would bring him. And Mr. Daniel——

KATE. Sh—— he's in there working.

BROWN. Working? Ah, God save us! Him working! The last man that seen Mr. Dan working is in his grave this twenty years. (*He goes over next workshop door.*) I'll just peep in at him through the keyhole. (*He goes over and does so, and then beckons* KATE *over. She peeps in and grins. As they are thus occupied* ALICK MCCREADY *opens the door and stands gazing at them. He is a type of the young well-to-do farmer, respectably dressed and good-looking.*)

ALICK. Well! Well! Some people earn their money easy!

BROWN. Aye. In soul. Just look in there to see it. (MCCREADY *looks in and bursts into a loud hearty laugh.* BROWN *hurriedly goes out by the yard door and* KATE *by door to inner rooms.*)

DANIEL (*opening door and standing there, perplexed looking*). What's the matter ?

ALICK. Ah. I was just laughing at a wee joke, Mr. Murray.

DANIEL. It must have been very funny.

ALICK. Aye. It was. (*Coming close to* DANIEL, *who walks slowly to the middle of the kitchen.*) I say. Were you at McArn's publichouse last night ?

DANIEL (*looking round cautiously to see that no one else can hear him*). Well, just a minute or two. Why ?

ALICK. There was someone there told Andy McMinn this morning, I believe, that you'd been talking of a great invention altogether, and he was that much curious to see it that him and his sister Sarah are coming over this day to have a look at it.

DANIEL. Who ? Sarah McMinn ?

ALICK. Aye. She's very anxious to see it, I believe.

DANIEL. Um. Rather awkward this. She's not a woman that, plainly speaking, I care very much to talk about my ideas to.

ALICK. But have you got something struck out ?

DANIEL. McCready, come here. (ALICK *goes closer to him.*) It is really a great idea. Splendid. But I've a great deal of trouble over it. In fact I've been thinking out details of a particular gear all morning.

ALICK. Aye. (*He looks at* DANIEL *and then endeavours to restrain unsuccessfully a burst of laughter.*)

DANIEL (*angrily*). You were always an ignorant fellow anyway and be d——d to you. (*He turns to go towards his workshop.*)

ALICK. Ah, Mr. Murray, I beg your pardon. It's another thing altogether I'm thinking about. I just wanted a talk with you this morning. You have a nice wee girl for a niece, Mr. Murray.

DANIEL (*somewhat mollified*). Well ?

ALICK (*bashfully*). And I was wondering if you could put in a good word for me now and again with her.

DANIEL. Now, look here, Alick. We can all work nice and comfortably together, can't we?

ALICK. Aye.

DANIEL. Well, if you behave yourself like a man with some manners, and not like an ignorant clodhopper, I can do a great deal for you.

ALICK. Thank you, sir. You know, Mr. Murray, I have as nice a wee farm, and as good stock on it as well, as any man in the county, and if I'm lucky enough to get that niece of yours, you'll always be welcome to come and pass a day or two and have a chat.

DANIEL. I think you and I will get along all right, Alick. There's one or two little things I need badly sometimes in this house. I mean I want help often, you know, Alick, to carry my points with John; points about going to see people and that sort of thing, and it's really very hard to manage John on points like that, unless we resort to certain means to convince him they are absolutely necessary.

ALICK (*uneasily*). Yes. I sort of follow you.

DANIEL. You know what I mean. John's a little dense, you know. He can't see the point of an argument very well unless you sort of knock him down with it. Now, if a thing is fair and reasonable, and a man is so dense that he can't see it, you are quite justified—at least, I take it so—to manufacture a way—it doesn't matter how—so long as you make that dense man accept the thing, whatever it is, as right. Do you follow me?

ALICK. I'm just beginning to see a kind of way.

MARY (*appearing at door from inner rooms*). I can't see that thing anywhere. (*She suddenly sees* ALICK.) Oh Alick! You here!

ALICK. Yes. It's a nice morning, and you're looking beautiful!

MARY. Oh, bother. (*She seems to suddenly recollect something.*) Oh, I say! uncle! You remember? Uncle!

DANIEL (*somewhat perplexed*). Eh?

MARY (*motioning towards* ALICK). Telegram to come to London.

DANIEL. Ah——Oh, yes, yes.

MARY. Let's go into your workshop and tell Alick what we want. Come on.

ALICK. I'll do anything in the world you want.

(*They all go into the workshop. As they disappear,* JOHN MURRAY, *sweating and angry looking, comes through from the yard followed by* BROWN. JOHN *is a tall, stout man, with a rather dour countenance and somewhat stolid expression. He is a year or so the elder of Dan in age. He goes to the dresser, puts his hand on the top shelf, takes down a spanner and throws it down angrily on the table.*)

JOHN. There. There you are, you stupid-looking, good for nothing, dunder-headed, Italian idiot you.

BROWN. You're something terrible cross this morning.

JOHN. (*heatedly*). Is it any wonder ? Away out at once now and put her to rights and quick about it. (BROWN *meekly goes out.*) The like of servant men nowadays, I never seen in my mortal days. A concern of ignorant bauchles, every one of them.

DANIEL (*opening door of workshop and peeping out. He sees* JOHN *and goes over to him with a genial air*). Good morning John.

JOHN (*snappishly*). Good afternoon.

DANIEL. John, what do you think, I believe I have just come on to a great idea about——

JOHN. Ach ! You and your great ideas ! Here you've been blundering and blethering and talking these fifteen years and more, and I've never seen anything come of them yet.

DANIEL (*soothingly*). I know, John, I know. But I'm handicapped you know. Bad place to work in and all the rest of it : but you've been kind to me, John. Keeping a brother and helping him after he has lost all his money isn't a common thing with many men, but John

a day will come sometime, and you'll get it all back. (*Impressively*). Every penny. Aye, and twice over.

JOHN (*softening*). Thank you, Daniel.

DANIEL. You will, John, you will. But don't cast up things like that about the time I've been. It hurts me. A thing like this takes time to mature, you know, John. The great and chief thing for an inventor is time. Look at Palissy, the great French potter, who found out how to make porcelain glaze. Why he worked for years and years at his invention. And there was the man who found out how to make steam drive engines. Look at the years those men spent—and no one begrudged them.

JOHN. I suppose that now.

DANIEL. Certainly, John, nothing surer. And look at the fortunes those men made. But the great difficulty is trying to get someone to take up your patent. You see these men had the eyes of the world fixed on them. People knew all about them, and had their hands stretched out ready to grab what they invented. (*Pathetically*). I——I'm just a poor unknown man struggling in a wee dark corner.

JOHN (*touched*). Never mind, Danny. You'll make the name of the Murray's known yet, maybe.

DANIEL. I'll do my best, John. But mind you it would take me to be pushing on this thing that I have found out and bringing it before people to notice. You see I've got it all ready now except for a few small details.

JOHN (*much interested*). Have you now? I would like you sometime to explain it to me, Daniel. I didn't quite get on to it the last time you were telling me about it.

DANIEL. Some time again. Oh yes. But John—I'll have to go to some of the towns soon to see people about it. The bigger the town the better the chance, and John (*impressively*)—London's the place.

JOHN (*aghast*). London! In all the name of the world, yon place! Would Belfast not do you?

DANIEL. No. I don't like Belfast. They're a mangy,

stick-in-the-mud, follow-in-the-old-ruts crowd. Never strike out anything new. It's a case of London or nothing.

JOHN (*dubiously*). It will be a terrible expense this London visiting.

DANIEL. It'll be worth it.

JOHN. Now, Danny, I would like to oblige you, but what do you think it would cost me ?

DANIEL. Well, I could live cheap you know, John, and do without meals an odd day, and go steerage and third class, and that sort of thing. I would say about fifteen pounds roughly. That would let me stay more than a week.

JOHN. Fifteen pounds ! God bless me, Daniel, would you break me ? No, no, I couldn't afford to give you that much.

DANIEL. Maybe ten would do it. I could sleep out under the arches an odd night or two, and——

JOHN. No, no. I'll not have that. A Murray aye had a bed to go to and a sup to eat. (*After a contemplative pause.*) Here, I'll give you three pounds and you can go to Belfast.

DANIEL. I don't care much about Belfast. You know I have been there five times now, and I have never got anyone to look into the thing at all proper.

JOHN. You're too backward, Daniel, when it comes to the like of that. But ten pounds ! No, I would like you to get on in the world right enough, Daniel, but I couldn't afford it. You know the way this house is being kept ; it's lamentable. Tea and sugar and flour and things. Man, I'm just after paying off ten pounds to the McAfees for one thing and another, and it only a running account for two months. If I had a good housekeeper now, maybe things would alter for the better.

MARY (*coming out from the workshop followed by* ALICK). O Uncle Dan ! He says he'll go at once and get it—— (*She stops short in confusion on seeing her father.*)

ALICK. How are you, Mr. Murray ?

JOHN. O ! bravely. What's the news with you ?

ALICK. I was just looking over some of them ideas of Daniel's, about the new fan bellows.

JOHN. Aye. Now what do you think of it?

ALICK (*warned by* DANIEL *who nudges him*). They're great altogether.

JOHN. Do you think there will be any sale for it at all?

ALICK. I think so. (*He perceives* DANIEL *motioning assent.*) I believe there would be indeed.

JOHN. Man, I wish I had the head of some of you young fellows to understand the working of them machinery and things. (DANIEL *goes back into the workshop.*) I've the worst head in the world for understanding about them sort of things. There's Daniel, a great head on him, Daniel.

ALICK (*slyly*). He has, right enough!

JOHN (*proudly*). One of the best. When he was a wee fellow, dang the one could beat him at making boats or drawing pictures, or explaining extraordinary things to you. None. Not one. A great head on him, Daniel. He'll do something yet.

ALICK. Did you know Andy McMinn's for coming over to see you this day, Mr. Murray?

JOHN (*eagerly*). This day? When? Are you sure?

ALICK. Aye, so he said. About two o'clock or so. Someone told him about Daniel's great new idea, and he's very curious to hear about it.

MARY. He's always poking his nose into people's business.

JOHN. Whist. Andy McMinn's a very decent man. Tell me (*rather bashfully*), was Sarah to come with him?

MARY (*alarmed*). O holy prophets! I hope not.

ALICK. Aye. She's coming too. She wanted to see it as well as Andy.

JOHN. Aye. Certainly, and she's welcome too. Mary, you can get the house ready, and the table set, and a nice tea for them when they come, and I can go and get tidied up a wee bit. (*He goes off through door into inner rooms.*)

ALICK (*leaning against the table and looking across at* MARY, *who is sitting at the opposite end.*) You're as nice a wee girl as ever I——

MARY. You're an awful fool. Hurry, Alick, like a decent man and get that telegram sent.

ALICK. That uncle of yours, Mary, heth he's as canny a keoghboy as I've seen. Its the queer tears he'll be taking to himself in London if I know anything.

MARY. Hold your tongue. You've no business to talk about Uncle Dan that way. He could give you tons as far as brains go anyway.

ALICK. I believe that. (*He goes to yard door, then turns back.*) I say, Mary. What name will I put on that telegram? "Come to London at once about patent. Intend purchasing." Had'nt we better have a name?

MARY. Yes. I'll just ask uncle. (*She knocks at door of workshop.*) Uncle!

DANIEL (*without*). Yes.

MARY. What name will we put to that telegram?

DANIEL (*without*). Oh, it's not particular. Wilson, or Smith, or Brown, or Gregg.

ALICK. I'll put Gregg on it.

DANIEL. Do well.

ALICK. Did you see the fluster that your father got into, Mary, when he heard that Sarah McMinn was coming over?

MARY (*alarmed*). What?

ALICK. Did you not see how he rushed off to tidy himself up when he heard Sarah McMinn was coming over?

MARY (*seating herself on chair to right of table*). Nonsense. Father wouldn't think of that woman.

ALICK. All right. But I think I know something more than you.

MARY (*anxiously*). What? Tell me.

ALICK. Come on and leave me down the loaning a pace, and I'll tell you.

MARY (*glancing at him, and then coquettishly turning*

her back to him as he leans against the table). Oh, I can't. Those people are coming over, and that McMinn woman will be looking at everything and telling you how to do things in front of father, and all the rest of it.

ALICK (*entreatingly*). Leave me down the loaning a pace till I tell you the news.

MARY (*teasingly*). No.

ALICK. Come on.

MARY. No. (ALICK *moves sadly towards the door.* MARY *looks round, and then laughingly skips past him out through the yard door, and he follows her.*)

JOHN (*coming through door from inner rooms partly dressed, with a towel in his hands, evidently making much preparation to clean himself*). Daniel! (*Loudly and crossly.*) Daniel!

DANIEL (*peeping out from workshop door*). Well!

JOHN. Tidy yourself up a wee bit, man, Andy McMinn and Sarah's coming over to see you.

DANIEL (*somewhat taken back*). Me?

JOHN. Aye. They want to see about the new invention. You can have the collar I wore last Sunday, and put on your new coat that you got in Belfast. (DANIEL *goes back into the workshop.*) I wonder what tie would be the better one? Yon green or the red one that Mary gave me last Christmas. Aye. (*Seeing no sign of* DANIEL.) D——n! Is he making no shapes to dress himself. Daniel!

DANIEL (*without*). Aye.

JOHN (*loudly*). Daniel!

DANIEL (*again appearing at door*). Well!

JOHN (*impatiently*). Come on and get on you.

DANIEL. Ach. This is always the way. Just when a man has got the whole thing worked out and the plans of the apparatus just on the point of completion he has to stop.

JOHN. Never mind, Danny. You can do it again the night or the morrow morning. I want you to look decent. Come on and get on you.

DANIEL (*beginning to regard his brother with a sudden interest and suspicion*). Who did you say was coming ?

JOHN (*at door to rooms*). Andy and Sarah McMinn. (*He goes out.*)

DANIEL (*suddenly realising the import of the preparations going on.*) McMinn. Mc——. (*He stops short, and then in a horrified voice.*) Surely to God he hasn't a notion of that woman ? (*Calling tremulously.*) John ! John !

JOHN (*at door*). Hurry up, man.

DANIEL (*appealingly*). John. Tell me, John. You haven't——you're not going to——you haven't a notion of that woman ?

JOHN (*hesitatingly*). Well, Daniel, you see the house needs some one to look after it proper, and I thought—— well—maybe—that Sarah would be just as nice and saving a woman as I could get, but I thought I would keep it a bit secret, don't you know, because I don't know yet if she'd have me or not. And she could talk to you better nor I could about machinery and things that would interest you, for she has an agency for sewing machines, and knows something about that sort of thing, and you'd get on great with each other. Now, hurry and get on you. (*He goes out by door into rooms.*)

DANIEL (*looking after him in a helpless manner, and sinking into a chair*). If—if she'd have him ! O great God ! If that woman comes to this house, I—I'm a ruined man.

(CURTAIN.)

ACT II.

The same scene some hours later. The curtain rises to discover KATE *seated near table at back enjoying a cup of tea which she has made, and is drinking with relish.*

KATE. I suppose they'll be wanting jam and sugar for the tea—aye—and some of them scones Miss Mary cooked yesterday, not but you couldn't eat them, and a pat or two of butter. (*She finishes off the remains of the tea.*) Now, that's a nice girl for you! Here's company coming till the house and tea and things a wanting, and she goes and leaves all to go strolling down the loaning with that fool of a McCready.

(BROWN *opens the yard door and comes in. He replaces the spanner on the top shelf and then turns and looks at* KATE.)

KATE. Well?

BROWN. Well, yourself?

KATE. Do you see any sign of them McMinns yet?

BROWN. Aye. I see the trap coming over the Cattle Hill. There was three in it, as far as I could make out.

KATE. Who be to be the third party I wonder? Is it their servant man?

BROWN. Do you think old Andy McMinn's servant man gets leave to drive them about of an afternoon like the clergy's? Talk sense, woman.

KATE. Maybe it's yon Scotch body I heard was stopping with them.

BROWN. Aye. Yon Mackenzie. Ach, man, but yon creature would scunder you.

KATE. Aye.

BROWN. Ach! Cracking jokes and laughing that hearty at them, and I'm danged if a bat with one eye

shut could make out what he was laughing at. (*Listening.*) Here they are. I hear the wheels coming up the loaning. I'll have to go and put up the horse for them I suppose. (*He goes out by yard door.*)

KATE. I wonder if the master seen them coming. (*She rapidly clears the table and then goes over to door into room.*) I better tell him. (*She knocks at the door.*)

JOHN (*without*). Aye. (*He comes and opens the door, dressed in his best suit of clothes.*) What's the matter ?

KATE. They're just come, sir.

JOHN (*excitedly*). Are they ? (*Comes into kitchen.*) Is my tie right, Kate ? And my clothes—is there any dirt on the back of them ?

KATE (*inspecting him critically*). You'll do grand. I never seen you looking better.

JOHN. Where's Mary ? Why isn't she here ?

KATE. She went out about something. She'll be back in a minute.

JOHN. Right enough, it would do her all the good in the world to have a sensible woman looking after her. She just gets her own way a deal too much in this house. (*He goes to window and looks out.*) Aye. Here they are ! Tell Daniel to hurry. (KATE *goes off by door to rooms.*) Sarah's looking bravely. Man, that woman could save me thirty, aye forty, pounds a year if she was here. (*Suddenly.*) Ach ! Is Daniel never ready yet ? (*Calls.*) Daniel ! (*Louder.*) Daniel !

DANIEL (*without*). Aye.

JOHN. Hurry, man. They've come. (JOHN *goes to yard door and goes out.*)

DANIEL (*in an exasperated voice*). Ach !

(JOHN *comes in followed by* ANDREW MCMINN, *an elderly non-descript sort of man, followed by* SARAH, *a sour faced spinster of uncertain age. In the rear is* DONAL MACKENZIE. *He is wearing a tourist costume of Norfolk jacket and knickers, and is a keen faced, hard, angular looking personage.*)

JOHN Yous are all welcome. Every one of you.

You Andy and Sarah, and Mr. Mackenzie. The Scotch is aye welcome, Mr. Mackenzie.

MACKENZIE. Aye. That's what I said the last time I was in Ballyannis, and was verra thirsty, and went into a beer-shop to get a dram—Black and White it was. Verra guid. (*He laughs loudly at his own joke.*)

SARAH. We brought Mr. Mackenzie along with us to see your brother, John. You see he's an engineer and knows a good deal about machinery and plans and things.

MACKENZIE. Aye. There's not much about machinery that I dinna ken, Mr. Murray, from a forty thousand horse power quadruple expansion doon to a freewheel bicycle. (*Proudly.*) I hae done spells work at all of them, you ken.

ANDY. I suppose Daniel's at home. Is he?

JOHN. Daniel? Oh aye, Daniel's at home. He's just tidying himself up a wee bit.

MACKENZIE. A wee bit paint and powder gangs a lang gait to make up defects, as you ken yourself, Miss McMinn. (*He laughs loudly.*) That's a guid one.

ANDY (*looking slyly at* SARAH). He's up out of bed then?

JOHN (*innocently*). Oh aye. He sits up late of nights working out things. (*He points to the door of workshop.*) That's his workshop.

MACKENZIE. He works then?

JOHN. Aye. He works in there. (*Andy goes over and goes into workshop.*)

MACKENZIE. Because it doesna follow always, as I have discovered in my experience, that because a man has a workshop, he works. (*He laughs, evidently much pleased at his own humour.*)

ANDY (*looking out again through door*). There's nothing much to see in this place except a lot of dirty papers.

JOHN. That's the plans of the bellows he's working at.

MACKENZIE (*going over to workshop*). Come out, Mr. McMinn, till I examine. (ANDY *comes out and he passes*

in.) Eh. This is the plan of the great bellows. (*He laughs loudly.*)

ANDY. Is he making much headway with it, John?

JOHN. Indeed, now, I think he's doing bravely at it. He's keeping very close at it this day or two.

ANDY. There's a terrible amount of newspapers lying in there. Has he no other plans and drawings except what's there?

JOHN. Oh aye. He has plenty of plans and drawings somewhere, for I seen them once or twice.

MACKENZIE (*coming out*). I can't say much about that contrivance. (*He laughs.*) And, I say. Look here. He does more than draw bellows. He draws corks as well. (*He produces a bottle of whiskey almost empty.*)

JOHN. Ah, well. He's not a great transgressor either in the matter of a bottle. No, no.

ANDY. And the smell of smoke in the place!

SARAH. John, I think Daniel smokes far too much.

ANDY. He should be dressed by now.

JOHN. Aye. Oh, aye. He should right enough. He's a wee bit backward before women, you know, Sarah. (*Calls.*) Daniel! (*He goes over and opens door into rooms.*) Daniel!

DANIEL (*without*). Yes. (*He appears at the door struggling vainly with his collar.*)

JOHN. Why didn't you come long ago. What kept you?

DANIEL. Your collar. (*He looks across at* ANDY *and* SARAH, *who have seated themselves at the back.*) How do you do, Andy and Sarah? You're very welcome. (*He looks at* MACKENZIE, *who stares curiously at him.*)

ANDY. This is a friend of ours, Daniel, that happened to be stopping with us last summer at Newcastle in the same house, and he came over for his holidays to us this time. We brought him over to see you. They calls him Mackenzie.

DANIEL (*crossing over to the left and taking a seat near the door of the workshop.*) How do you do?

MACKENZIE (*patronisingly*). I'm glad to see you at last, Mr. Murray, for I've heard a good deal about you.

SARAH. You see, Daniel, Mr. Mackenzie is an engineer in one of the great Scotch engineering yards. (DANIEL'S *face expresses his dismay, which he hurriedly tries to hide.*) What place was it you were in, Mr. Mackenzie?

MACKENZIE. I served six years in the engine and fitting shops with Messrs. Ferguson, Hartie & Macpherson, and was two years shop foreman afterwards to Dennison, McLachlan & Co., and now I'm senior partner with the firm of Stephenson & Mackenzie. If ever you're up in Greenock direction, and want to see how we do it, just ask for Donal Mackenzie, and they'll show you the place. (*Proudly.*) We're the sole makers of the Mackenzie piston, if ever you heard of it.

DANIEL (*uneasily*). I'm sorry to say I haven't.

MACKENZIE. And you call yourself an engineer and you don't know about Donal Mackenzie's patent reciprocating piston.

JOHN (*apologetically*). You see we be a bit out of the world here, Mr. Mackenzie.

DANIEL. Yes. Now that's one point. One great point that always tells against me. (*Getting courageous.*) It really needs a man to be continually visiting the great engineering centres—Greenock, London—

MACKENZIE (*scornfully*). London's not an engineering centre—Glasgow, Hartlepool, Newcastle——

DANIEL. Well, all those places. He could keep himself posted up in all the newest ideas then, and inventions.

MACKENZIE. But a man can keep himself to the fore if he reads the technical journals and follows their articles. What technical papers do you get? Do you ever get the Scottish Engineers' Monthly Handbook, price sixpence monthly? I'm the writer on the inventors' column. My articles are signed Fergus McLachlan. Perhaps you've read them?

DANIEL. I think—um—I'm not quite sure that I have.

MACKENZIE. You remember one I wrote on the new compressed air drills last July ?

DANIEL (*looking across at* JOHN, *who is standing with his back to the fireplace*). I don't think I do.

JOHN. No. We don't get them sort of papers. I did buy one or two like them for Daniel, but he told me he would just as soon have the *Whig*, for there was just as much information in it.

MACKENZIE (*laughing*). O spirit of Burns ! Just as much information—well, so much for that. Now, about this new patent, this new fan bellows that I hear you're working at, Mr. Murray.

DANIEL. What about it ?

ANDY. We both seen the drawings in there, Daniel, but I don't think either of us made much of it. Could you not explain it to him, Daniel. Give him an idea what you mean to do with it.

JOHN. Aye. Now's your chance, Daniel. You were talking of some difficulty or other. Maybe this gentleman could help you with it.

DANIEL (*shifting uneasily, and looking appealingly at* JOHN). Well. There's no great hurry. A little later on in the evening. (*He looks at* SARAH.) I'm thinking about Miss McMinn. I don't think this conversation would be very interesting to her.

SARAH. Oh, indeed now, Mr. Murray, I just love to know about it. A good fan bellows would be the great thing for yon fireplace of ours, Andy.

ANDY. Aye. Soul, it would that.

DANIEL (*uncomfortably*). No. Not just yet, John. A bit later on. I'm shy, John, you know. A bit backward before company.

JOHN. You're a man to talk about going to see people in London.

SARAH. What ? Was he going to London ?

JOHN. Aye. He was taking about going to London, and I was half-minded to let him go.

ANDY (*who exchanges meaning glances with* SARAH). Boys, that would cost a wheen of pounds!

MACKENZIE. Who wull you go to see in London?

DANIEL (*evasively*). Oh—engineers and patent agents and people that would take an interest in that sort of thing.

MACKENZIE. Have you anyone to go to in particular?

DANIEL. Oh, yes.

SARAH. It will cost a great deal of money, Daniel. Seven or eight pounds anyway. Won't it, Mr. Mackenzie?

MACKENZIE. It would, and more.

JOHN (*looking at* SARAH *with evident admiration*). Man, that's a saving woman. She can count the pounds. (*Suddenly*). Daniel, away out and show Andy and Mr. Mackenzie the thresher, and get used to the company, and then you can come in and explain the thing to them. I want Sarah to stay here and help me to make the tea. That fool of a Mary is away again somewhere.

ANDY (*after a sly glance at* SARAH). Aye. Come on, Daniel, and explain it to us. I hear there's a new kind of feedboard on her.

MACKENZIE. How is she driven, Mr. Murray?

DANIEL (*uncomfortably*). How is she what?

MACKENZIE. How is she worked—steam, horse, or water power, which?

JOHN (*motioning* DANIEL *to go, which the latter does very unwillingly*). Go on out and you can show them, Daniel. (DANIEL, ANDY, *and* MACKENZIE *go out through yard door.*) He's backward, you know, Sarah, oh, aye—backward; but a great head. A great head on him, Daniel.

SARAH. I suppose he is clever in his way.

JOHN (*seating himself close beside her and talking with innocent enthusiasm*). Ah, boys, Sarah, I mind when he went to serve his time with McArthurs, of Ballygrainey, he was as clever a boy as come out of the ten townlands. And then he set up for himself, you know, and lost all, and then he come here. He's doing his best, poor

creature, till pay me for what kindness I showed him, by trying to invent things that he says would maybe pay off, some time or other, all he owes to me.

SARAH (*cynically*). Poor Daniel! And he lost all his money?

JOHN. Aye. Every ha'penny; and he took a hundred pounds off me as well. And now, poor soul, he hasn't a shilling, barring an odd pound or two I give him once or twice a month.

SARAH. Well! Well! And he's been a long time this way?

JOHN. Aye. (*Reflectively.*) I suppose it's coming on now to twenty years.

SARAH. It's a wonder he wouldn't make some shapes to try and get a situation somewhere.

JOHN. Ach, well, you know, when Annie, the wife, died and left Mary a wee bit of a wain, I was lonesome, and Daniel was always a right heartsome fellow, and I never asked him about going when he came here.

SARAH. He must be rather an expense to you. Pocket money for tobacco, and whenever he goes out a night to McArn's, its a treat all round to who is in at the time. And his clothes and boots, and let alone that, his going to see people about patents and things up to Belfast three or four times in the year. If he was in a situation and doing for himself, you could save a bit of money.

JOHN (*pensively*). Aye. Heth and I never thought much of that, Sarah. I could right enough. I'll think over that now. (*He looks at her, and then begins in a bashful manner.*) You weren't at Ballyannis School fête, Sarah?

SARAH. No. But I heard you were there. Why?

JOHN (*coming still closer*). I was expecting to see you.

SARAH (*contemptuously*). I don't believe in young girls going to them things.

JOHN (*gazing at her in astonishment*). But God bless me, they wouldn't call you young! (SARAH *turns up her*

nose disgustedly.) I missed you. Man, I was looking for you all roads.

SARAH. I'm not a fool sort of young girl that you can just pass an idle hour or two with, John Murray, mind that.

JOHN. I never thought that of you, Sarah.

SARAH. Some people think that.

JOHN (*astonished*). No.

SARAH. They do. There's Andy just after warning me this morning about making a fool of myself.

JOHN (*puzzled*). But you never done that, Sarah.

SARAH. Well, he was just after giving me advice about going round flirting with Tom, Dick and Harry.

JOHN. Ah no. You never done that. Sure I knowed you this years and years, and you never had a boy to my knowing.

SARAH (*offended*). Well I had, plenty. Only I just wouldn't take them. I refused more than three offers in my time.

JOHN (*incredulously*). Well! Well! And you wouldn't have them!

SARAH. No.

JOHN. Why now?

SARAH (*looking at him meaningly*). Well—I liked somebody else better.

JOHN (*piqued*). Did he—the somebody—did he never ask you?

SARAH. He might yet, maybe.

JOHN (*hopelessly to himself*). I wonder would it be any use then me asking her.

SARAH. And I'm beginning to think he is a long time thinking about it. (*Knocking at the door.*)

JOHN (*angrily*). Ach! Who's that?

BROWN (*opening yard door and looking in*). Me, sir. Mr. Dan wants to know could you not come out a minute, and show the gentlemen what way you can stop the feedboard working.

JOHN. Don't you know yourself, you stupid headed

lump you. Away back at once. (BROWN *hurriedly closes the door after an inquiring glance at the pair.*) That's them servant men for you. He knowed rightly what way it worked, only he was just curious. (*Savagely.*) He's a stupid creature, anyway.

SARAH. I think all men is stupid. They never see things at all.

JOHN. Now, Sarah, sure women are just as bad. There's Mary. She's bright enough someways, but others—ach——

SARAH. Mary needs someone—a woman—to look after her. Somebody that knows how to manage a house and save money. She's lost running about here. Now, I had a young girl with me once was a wild useless thing when she came, and when she left me six months after, there wasn't a better trained, nor as meek a child in the whole country.

JOHN. And you can manage a house, Sarah, and well, too. Can't you?

SARAH. I ran the house for Andy there twenty years and more, and I never once had to ask him for a pound. And what's more, I put some into the bank every quarter.

JOHN. Did you now? (*He looks at her in wondering admiration.*)

SARAH. Yes. And I cleared five pounds on butter last half year.

JOHN (*with growing wonder*). Did you?

SARAH. And made a profit of ten pounds on eggs alone this year already.

JOHN (*unable to contain himself any longer*). Sarah, will you marry me?

SARAH (*coyly*). Oh, John, this is very sudden. (*Knocking at yard door.*) I will. I will. Will you tell them when they come in?

JOHN (*now that the ordeal has been passed, feeling somewhat uncomfortable*). Well, I would rather you waited a few days, and then we could let them know, canny, don't you know, Sarah. Break the news soft, so to speak. Eh?

SARAH (*disappointedly*). Well, if you want it particular that way I—(*knocking*).

JOHN (*going to door*). Aye, I'd rather you did. (*He goes to the door and opens it and* MARY *comes in.*)

MARY. I peeped through the window and I thought, perhaps, it would be better to knock first. Its a nice evening Miss McMinn. (*She takes off her hat and flings it carelessly on a chair.*) Where's Uncle Dan? I want to see him.

JOHN. He'll be in soon enough. He's out showing Andy and Mackenzie the thresher.

MARY (*laughing*). Uncle Dan! What does he know about——(*she stops short, remembering that* SARAH *is present.*) Mr. Mackenzie?

SARAH. Yes. He's a gentleman, a friend of ours, engaged in the engineering business, who has a large place of his own in Scotland, and we brought him over here to see your Uncle Dan about the invention he's working at.

JOHN. You stop here, Mary, with Sarah, and get the tea ready. You should have been in the house when company was coming. Where were you?

MARY. Oh, just down the loaning.

JOHN. Who with?

MARY. Alick McCready.

JOHN (*sternly*). Aye. You're gay fond of tralloping about with the boys.

SARAH. He's not just the sort of young man I would like to see in your company, Mary.

MARY (*impertinently*). It's none of your business whose company I was in.

JOHN (*disapprovingly*). Now, Mary, remember your manners in front of your elders, and mind you must always show Miss McMinn particular respect. (*Impressively*). Particular respect. (*Going towards yard door.*) And you can show Sarah what you have in the house, and do what she bids you. Them's my orders. (*He goes out.*)

SARAH (*looking disapprovingly at* MARY). I wonder a girl like you has no more sense than to go gallivanting about at this time of day with boys, making talk for the whole country side.

MARY (*sharply*). I don't have to run after them to other people's houses anyway.

SARAH. And that is no way to be leaving down your hat. (*She picks it up and looks at it.*) Is that your Sunday one?

MARY (*snatching it out of her hand*). Just find out for yourself.

SARAH. Now, you should take and put it away carefully. There's no need to waste money that way, wearing things out.

MARY (*with rising temper*). Do you know it's *my* hat? Not yours. And I can do what I like with it. (*She throws it down and stamps on it.*) I can tramp on it if I want to.

SARAH (*smiling grimly*). Oh, well, tramp away. It's no wonder your father complained of waste and this sort of conduct going on.

(KATE *comes in through door from rooms.*)

MARY. Have you got the tea things ready, Kate?

KATE. Yes, Miss.

MARY. I suppose we better wet the tea.

SARAH (*looking at the fire*). Have you the kettle on?

MARY. Can't you see for yourself it's not on.

SARAH. Here, girl (*to* KATE), fill the kettle and put it on. (KATE *looks at* MARY, *and with a shrug of her shoulders, obeys the orders.*) Where's the tea till I show you how to measure?

MARY (*in a mocking voice*). Kate, get Miss McMinn the tea cannister till she shows you how to measure. (KATE *goes to the dresser and brings the teapot and cannister over to* SARAH *at the table.*)

SARAH. But it's *you* I want to show. (MARY *pays no attention; but sits down idly drumming her fingers on the table.*) There now—pay particular attention to this. (*She takes the cannister from* KATE, *opens it and ladles out*

the tea with a spoon into the teapot.) One spoonful for your father and uncle, one for my brother and Mr. Mackenzie, one for yourself and me, and half-a-one for Kate.

MARY. Do you see that, Kate?

KATE. Yes, Miss.

MARY (*mockingly*). Now the next thing, I suppose, is to weigh out the sugar.

SARAH. No. You always ask the company first do they take sugar before you pour out the tea.

MARY. No; not in good society. You put it on the saucers.

SARAH. Put some in the bowl, Kate, and never heed her.

MARY (*almost tearfully*). You've no business to say that, Kate! Who's your mistress here?

KATE (*very promptly*). You, Miss.

MARY. Then do what I tell you. Put on the table-cloth, and lay the cups and saucers, and make everything ready, and take no orders except from me.

SARAH. Very well. I'll learn her manners when I come to this house. (*To* MARY) I want to see the china.

MARY. Well, go into the next room and look for it.

SARAH (*going towards door to rooms*). You better mind what your father told you. (*She goes in.*)

MARY (*making a face after her*). You nasty old thing. (DANIEL *appears at the door from yard. He is nervous and worried looking. He goes and sits down near the fire-place, wearily.*) Uncle Dan. (*She goes over close beside him.*) Wasn't it good of Alick? He went away to Bally-annis Post Office to get that telegram sent.

DANIEL. A very decent fellow, Alick. (*Gratefully.*) Very obliging.

MARY (*confidingly*). Do you know, uncle, when he went off to send that telegram I was nearly calling him back. I don't care so very much now whether I see that boy you were telling me about or not. Is he—do you think, uncle—is he much nicer than Alick?

DANIEL. Nicer? (*He looks at his niece, and then*

begins to divine the way her feelings lie.) Well, of course we have all our opinions on these things you know, Mary, but Alick—well, after all there's many a worse fellow than Alick, isn't there? (MARY *does not answer, but puts her head close to her uncle.*) Ah, yes

MARY (*suddenly*). Uncle! Do you know what has happened? I heard father proposing to Miss McMinn!

DANIEL (*groaning*). Oh my! I knew it would happen! I knew it would happen! When? Where?

MARY. In here. I wanted to slip in quietly after leaving Alick down the loaning when I overheard the voices. It was father and Miss McMinn. She was telling him how she had saved five pounds on butter last half year, and ten pounds on eggs this year, and then father asked her to marry him. I knocked at the door out of divilment, and she just pitched herself at him. I—I'm not going to stay in the house with that woman. I'd sooner marry Alick McCready.

DANIEL (*despairingly*). I would myself. I daren't—I couldn't face the look of that woman in the mornings.

MARY. It's all right for you to talk, uncle. You'll be working away at your inventions, and that sort of thing, and will have nothing much to do with her, but I'd be under her thumb all the time. And I hate her, and I know she hates me. (*Tearfully.*) And then the way father talks about her being such a fine housekeeper, and about the waste that goes on in this house, it nearly makes me cry, just because I have been a bit careless maybe. But I could manage a house every bit as well as she could, and I'd show father that if I only got another chance. Couldn't I uncle?

DANIEL (*soothingly*). And far better, Mary. Far better.

MARY. And you could do far more at your invention if you only got a chance. Couldn't you, uncle?

DANIEL. No doubt about it, Mary. None. I never got much of a chance here.

MARY. I wonder could we both try to get another chance. (*Suddenly, with animation.*) Uncle!

DANIEL. Well?

MARY. Aren't you going to explain that fan bellows thing you've been working at to them when they come in? (DANIEL *nods sadly.*) Well, look. That Scotchman—he understands things like that, and that's just the reason why that nasty woman brought him over. Just to trip you and show you up, and she thinks she'll make father see through you. But just you rise to the occasion and astonish them. Eh, uncle?

DANIEL (*uneasily*). Um—well, I don't know. That Scotchman's rather a dense sort of fellow. Very hard to get on with somehow.

MARY. Now, Uncle Dan, its our last chance. Let us beat that woman somehow or other.

DANIEL. Its all very well, Mary, to talk that way. (*Suddenly.*) I wonder is there a book on machinery in the house?

MARY. Machinery? Let me think. Yes, I do believe Kate was reading some book yesterday about things, and there was something about machinery in it.

DANIEL. For Heaven's sake, Mary, get it.

MARY (*calling*). Kate! Are you there, Kate? (KATE *comes in from inner rooms.*) Where's that book you were reading last night, Kate?

KATE (*surprised*). For dear's sake, Miss! Yon dirty old thing? The one with the big talk between the old fellow and the son about everything in the world you could think of?

MARY. Yes, yes. Uncle Dan wants it. (KATE *fetches a tattered volume from the dresser and hands it to* DANIEL. DANIEL *opens it, and reads while the two girls peer over his shoulder.*)

DANIEL (*reading slowly*). "The Child's Educator. A series of conversations between Charles and his father regarding the natural philosophy, as revealed to us, by the Very Reverend Ezekiel Johnston"

KATE (*much interested*). Aye. Just go on till you see Mr. Dan. Its the queerest conversation between an old lad and his son ever you heard tell of.

DANIEL (*reading*). Ah! "The simple forms of machines. The lever, the wedge, the inclined plane—Father—and here we come to further consider the application of this principle, my dear Charles, to what is known as the differential wheel and axle. Um Charles—Father—Charles. Father." (*He looks up despairingly at* MARY.) No good, my dear. Out of date. (*He, however, resumes reading the book carefully.*)

KATE (*nudging* MARY, *and pointing to door into rooms*). She's going into all the cupboards and drawers, and looking at everything. (*She turns to go back and opens the door to pass through.*) I never seen such a woman.

MARY (*raising her voice so as to let* SARAH *hear her*). Just keep an eye on her, Kate, and see she doesn't take anything.

DANIEL. I might get something out of this. Atmosphere. Pressure.

MARY. Uncle Dan. (*He pays no attention, but is absorbed in the book*). Uncle Dan, I'm going down the loaning a pace. Alick said he might be back, and I think—(*she sees he is not listening, and slips back to look over his shoulder.*)

DANIEL (*reading*). Charles. And now my dear father, after discussing in such clear and lucid terms the use of the barometer, and how it is constructed, could you tell me or explain the meaning of the word "pneumatic."

MARY (*going towards yard door*). Good luck, Uncle Danny. I'm away. (*She goes out.*)

DANIEL. There's not much here about bellows. (*Hopelessly.*) I wish I had made up this subject a little better. (KATE *comes in evidently much perturbed and angry.*)

KATE. The divil take her and them remarks of hers. Who gave her the right to go searching that way, I wonder? Where's the silver kept, and was it locked,

and how many spoons was there, and why weren't they better polished; and part of the china broke.

SARAH (*coming to door and speaking. As soon as* DANIEL *hears her voice he hurriedly retreats across to the workshop.*) Where do you keep the knives and forks?

KATE. You don't want forks for the tea.

SARAH. I want to count them.

KATE (*in amazement*). Oh, God save us! You'd think there was a pross on the house! (*She follows* SARAH *in through door* MACKENZIE *comes in, followed by* JOHN, *then* ANDY.)

MACKENZIE. And it was a great idea, you know. The steam passed through the condenser, and the exhaust was never open to the atmosphere.

JOHN (*evidently much impressed, and repeating the word in a wondering manner.*) Aye. The exhaust!

MACKENZIE. Aye. The exhaust. But now I'm verra anxious to hear your brother explaining what he's made out about the bellows. Its the small things like that you ken that a man makes a fortune of, not the big ones.

JOHN (*impressed*). Do you think that now?

MACKENZIE. You know I take a particular interest in bellows myself. I tried my hand a good while working out a new kind of bellows, and I flatter myself that I know something about the subject.

JOHN. Aye. (*Looking round.*) Where's Daniel? Daniel! Are you there, Daniel? (DANIEL *comes out and stands near the door.*) You could maybe bring them plans out you're working at and explain it to them now, Daniel. Eh? And wait, Sarah wants to hear it too. (*Calling.*) Are you there, Sarah?

DANIEL (*seating himself sadly*). Aye. She's in there somewhere taking stock.

JOHN (*going next door to rooms*). Are you there, dear? (SARAH *comes out.*) Daniel's going to explain the thing to us, and you wanted to hear about it. Didn't you?

SARAH. I'm just dying to know all about it. (*She seats herself to the right at back.* ANDY *sits on one side*

of the table and MACKENZIE *at the other, expectantly, while* JOHN *goes over to the fireplace almost opposite his brother.*) You know, Mr. Daniel, that's one thing we want very bad in our house—a good fan bellows.

DANIEL. They are very useful, very.

JOHN. Aye. They are that. (*To* SARAH). He has a good head on him, Daniel. Eh? (*To* DANIEL.) Now go on and make it very plain so that every one can follow you. Bring out the plans and show us.

DANIEL (*uneasily*.) I can explain it better without them (*After a pause.*) Well, I suppose this subject of bellows would come under the heading of pneumatics in natural philosophy.

JOHN. Oh, now, don't be going off that way. Could you not make it plainer nor that?

DANIEL (*appealingly*). Well. Could I be much plainer, Mr. Mackenzie?

MACKENZIE (*cynically*). I'm here to discuss fan bellows, not pneumatics.

DANIEL (*sotto voce*). D—n him. (*He pulls himself together.*) Well. Then I suppose the first thing is—well—to know what is a bellows.

ANDY. Aye. Man, Daniel, you start off just the same as the clergy. That's the way they always goes on expounding things to you.

SARAH (*severely*). Don't be interrupting, Andy.

MACKENZIE (*sneeringly*). Well, I think everyone here knows what a bellows is.

DANIEL. Everyone here? Do you, John?

JOHN. Aye. I would like, Daniel, to hear right what a bellows is. I mean I can see the thing blowing up a fire when you use it, any man could see that—but its the workings of it. What's the arrangements and internal works of the bellows now, Daniel?

DANIEL. Well, you push the handles together in an ordinary bellows and—and the air—blows out. (*Seeing that this statement is received coldly.*) Now, why does it blow out?

JOHN (*disappointedly*). Because it's pushed out of course. There's no sense in asking that sort of a question.

DANIEL. Well, there's a flap on the bellows—a thing that moves up and down. Well, that flap has all to do with pushing the air.

JOHN. Maybe this scientifican business is uninteresting to you, Sarah, is it ?

DANIEL (*brightening up at the suggestion*). I'm sure it is. Perhaps we better stop.

SARAH (*smiling grimly*). Oh, not at all. I want to hear more.

MACKENZIE. You're wasting a lot of my time, Mr. Murray. I came here to hear about a fan bellows.

DANIEL (*confusedly*). Oh, yes. Yes. Certainly. Fan bellows. There's a difference between a fan bellows and an ordinary bellows.

MARY (*opening door from yard and coming in*). Oh, Uncle Dan, are you explaining it to them. Did I miss much of it ?

MACKENZIE. I don't think it matters much what time you come in during this.

JOHN (*impatiently*). Go on, Daniel.

DANIEL. It's very hard for me to go on with these constant interruptions. Well, I was just saying there was a difference between a fan bellows and an ordinary bellows.

MACKENZIE. Now, what is a fan bellows yourself, Mr. Murray ?

DANIEL (*hopelessly*). A fan bellows ? Ah. Why now is it called a fan bellows ?

MACKENZIE (*roughly*). Don't be asking me my own questions.

DANIEL (*with a despairing effort*). Well, now we will take it for granted it is because there must be something of the nature of a fan about a fan bellows. It is because there are fans inside the casing. And the handle being turned causes these—eh—fans to turn round too. And then the air comes out with a rush.

JOHN. Aye. It must be the fans that pushes it out.

DANIEL. Exactly. Well, now, the difficulty we find here is—(*he pauses*).

ANDY. Aye.

JOHN. Go on, Daniel.

DANIEL. You want a constant draught blowing. That's number one. Then—well—the other. You see, if we took some of these fans.

MACKENZIE. Yes.

DANIEL (*in a floundering way*). And put them in a tight-fitting case, and put more of them inside, and understood exactly what their size was, we could arrange for the way that—

JOHN (*in a puzzled way to* SARAH). I can only follow Daniel a short way too. (*Repeating slowly.*) Put them in a tight-fitting case—

BROWN (*appearing at yard door with a telegram in his hand, and speaking with suppressed excitement*). A telegram for Mr. Daniel.

DANIEL (*with a gasp of relief*). Ah! (*He tears it open and proudly reads it out aloud.*) "Come to London at once to explain patent. Want to purchase. Gregg."

(BROWN *goes out again.*)

MACKENZIE. Who? Gregg?

DANIEL. I suppose I better go, John?

JOHN. Let's see the telegram. (*He goes over to* DANIEL, *who hands it to him.*)

MACKENZIE. If you go to London, it'll take you to explain yourself a bit better, Mr. Murray.

JOHN (*who has resumed his place at the fire, and is looking carefully at the telegram*). That will mean how many pounds, Daniel, did you say?

DANIEL (*promptly*). Fifteen, John. (MARY *goes out by door to rooms.*)

MACKENZIE. Who is Gregg?

DANIEL. Gregg? Ah. He's a man lives in London. Engineer.

JOHN (*dubiously*). Well, I suppose you—(*he pauses,*

then hands the telegram to SARAH, *who stretches out her hand for it.*)

MARY (*at door*). Tea's ready. (*She stands aside to let the company past.*)

SARAH. We didn't hear all about the bellows.

ANDY (*contemptuously.*) No, nor you never will. (*He rises and goes through the door.*)

MACKENZIE (*rising and stretching himself wearily*). Any more, Mr. Murray?

DANIEL. I refuse to discuss the matter any further in public. (*He goes off across to tea.*)

MACKENZIE (*going over to* JOHN *and looking at him knowingly*). Do you know what it is, Mr. Murray? Your brother's nothing short of an impostor.

JOHN (*much offended*). Don't dare to say that of a Murray.

MACKENZIE (*shrugging his shoulders*). Well, I'm going for some tea. (*Exit.*)

SARAH. John, I've something to say to you again about Daniel, but the company's waiting. (*She goes out to the tea room.*)

JOHN (*sitting down moodily*). Aye.

MARY. Are you not coming, father?

JOHN. Aye.

MARY. Father! Surely you aren't going to marry that woman?

JOHN. Don't talk of Sarah that ways. I am!

MARY. Well, if you are, I'm going to say yes to Alick McCready. I don't want to yet awhile, but I'm not going to stay on here if that nasty woman comes. (*She kneels close beside her father and puts her arms round his neck.*) Oh, father, if you only give me another chance, I could show you I could keep house every bit as well as that woman. (DANIEL *appears at the door. He slips across to the workshop unobserved.*) Give me another chance, father. Don't marry her at all. Let me stay with you—won't you?

JOHN. You're too late. She's trothed to me now.

MARY. Pooh. I'd think nothing of that. (DANIEL *comes out of the workshop with a bag.*) Uncle Dan! What's the matter?

DANIEL. Mary, I can't eat and sit beside that Scotchman. (*He notices* JOHN *is absorbed in deep thought, and motions* MARY *to slip out. She does so, and he looks observingly at* JOHN, *and then goes to the table, and makes a noise with the bag on the table.* JOHN *watches him a moment or two in amazed silence.*)

JOHN. What are you doing, Daniel?

DANIEL. Just making a few preparations.

JOHN. Ah, but look here. I haven't settled about London yet, Daniel.

DANIEL. Oh, London, John. (*Deprecatingly.*) Let that pass. I won't worry you about that. (*Broken heartedly.*) I'm leaving your house, John.

JOHN (*astonished*). What?

DANIEL. You've been kind, John. Very kind. We always pulled well together, and never had much cross words with one another, but—well, circumstances are altered now.

JOHN. You mean because I'm going to marry Sarah.

DANIEL. Exactly. That puts an end to our long and pleasant sojourn here together. I'll have to go.

JOHN (*affected*). Oh easy, Daniel. Ah, now, Sarah always liked you. She thinks a deal of you, and I'm sure she'd miss you out of the house as much as myself.

DANIEL. John, I know better. She wants me out of this, and I would only be a source of unhappiness. I wouldn't like to cause you sorrow. She doesn't believe in me. She brought that Scotchman over to try and show me up. You all think he did. You think I mugged the thing. You don't believe in me now yourself. (*He puts a few articles of clothing, &c., into the bag.*)

JOHN (*awkwardly*). Aye. Well—to tell you the truth, Daniel, you did not make much of a hand at explaining, you——

DANIEL (*pathetically*). I thought so. Look here.

One word. (*He draws* JOHN *aside.*) Do you think Mackenzie invented that patent reciprocating piston that he's so proud of ?

JOHN (*looking at him in amazement*). What ?

DANIEL (*impressively*). Well. I know something about that. He stole it off another man, and took all the profits. I knew that. Do you think I'm going to give away the product of my brains explaining it to a man like that ! No fear, John. (*He turns again to the bag.*) I'm taking details of my bellows, and my coat, and a few socks, and the pound you gave me yesterday, and I'm going to face the world alone.

JOHN (*moved*). No, no. You'll not leave me, Daniel. Ah, no. I never meant that.

DANIEL. If she's coming here I'll have to go, and may as well now.

SARAH (*without*). John Murray !

DANIEL (*retreating slowly to the workshop*). I'm going to get that other coat you gave me. It's better than this one for seeing people in. (*He goes into workshop as* SARAH *comes out into the kitchen. She is evidently displeased.*)

SARAH. Hurry up, John. The company's waiting on you, and I don't know what's keeping you. Unless it was that brother of yours, more shame to him.

JOHN. Aye. Daniel kept me. (*Looking at her.*) He's talking of leaving. You wouldn't have that, Sarah, would you ?

SARAH (*sharply*). Leaving, is he ? And a right good riddance say I. What has he done but ate up all your substance.

JOHN (*astonished*). You wouldn't put him out, Sarah ?

SARAH (*snappishly*). I just wouldn't have him about the place. An idle, good for nothing, useless, old pull a cork.

JOHN. Do you not like him, Sarah ? (*Somewhat disapprovingly.*) You told me you thought a good deal of him before.

SARAH. Aye. Until I seen through him. Him and his letters and telegrams. Just look at that. (*She shows him the telegram.*) It comes from Ballyannis.

JOHN (*scratching his head in puzzled wonder.*) I don't understand that.

SARAH. He just put up some one to send it. Young McCready or someone. You couldn't watch a man like that. No. If I come here, out he goes. You expects me to come and save you money and the like of that old bauchle eating up the profits. (*She goes towards the door into tea room.*) Come into your tea at once. (*Exit.*)

JOHN. By me sang he was right. (DANIEL *comes out and starts brushing his coat loudly to attract* JOHN'S *attention, and then goes across towards him and holds out his hand.*)

DANIEL. I'll say good-bye, John. Maybe I'll never see you again. (*He appears much affected.*)

JOHN (*touched*). Ach. Take your time. I don't see the sense of this hurrying. Stop a week or two, man. I'll be lonesome without you. We had many a good crack in the evenings, Daniel.

DANIEL. We had, John. And I suppose now that you'll be married I'll have to go, but many a time I'll be sitting lonely and thinking of them.

JOHN. Aye. You were always the best of company, and heartsome. You were, Daniel.

DANIEL. Well, I did my best, John, to keep—(*he half breaks down*)—to keep up a good heart.

JOHN. You did. I wouldn't like to lose you, Daniel. (*He looks at the telegram in his hand.*) But Daniel. This telegram. It comes from Ballyannis.

DANIEL (*taken aback, but recovering his self possession.*) Ballyannis? Ballyannis? Ah, of course. Sure Gregg, that London man, he was to go through Ballyannis to-day. He's on a visit, you know, somewhere this way. It's him I'm going to look for now.

JOHN. Was that the way of it? (*With rising anger at the thought of the way in which his brother has been treated.*) And she was for making you out an impostor and for

putting you out. I didn't like them talking of a Murray the way they done.

DANIEL (*with sudden hope*). Are you engaged to that McMinn woman, John ?

JOHN. Aye. I spoke the word the day.

DANIEL. Was there anybody there when you asked her ?

JOHN. There was no one.

DANIEL. Did you write her letters ?

JOHN. No. Not a line.

DANIEL. And did you visit and court much at the home ?

JOHN. No. I always seen Andy on business and stopped to have a word or two with her.

DANIEL (*appealingly*). Then, John, John, it's not too late yet. (*Desperately.*) Give me—ah, give wee Mary another chance.

SARAH (*at door*). Come in, John, at once. Your tea's cold waiting, and it's no way to entertain company that.

JOHN (*angrily*). D—n her. Daniel ! Out of this home you will not go. I'd rather have your crack of a winter night as two hundred pounds in the bank and yon woman. (*He reaches out his hand.*) I'll break the match (*The two men shake hands.*)

(CURTAIN.)

ACT III.

The same scene two weeks later. The Curtain rises to discover MARY *seated near table reading a cookery book to* KATE, *who, paying but little attention, is watching a pot boiling on the fire.*

MARY. Listen, Kate, to this. "A most desirable addition to this most appetising dish from the point of view of a gourmet"——

KATE. A what, Miss ?

MARY. A gourmet.

KATE. Now what kind of a thing would that be.

MARY. It's French for a cook or something—I forget—"a most desirable addition to this dish from the point of view of a "—— (*The yard door opens, and* SAM BROWN *appears with letters in his hand.* MARY *immediately throws the book aside and rushes over to him.*)

MARY. Letters ! Any for me, Sam ?

BROWN. Aye. There's a post card for you, Miss Mary, and a registered letter for Mr. John. The posty says he'll call on the road back for the account when you sign it. (*He hands the post card to* MARY *and looks carefully at the letter.*) It's like the McMinn writing that. (*He looks at* MARY, *who is reading and re-reading the post card with a puzzled expression.*) Isn't Mr. Dan to be home to-day from Belfast, Miss Mary ?

MARY. Eh ?

BROWN. Isn't Mr. Dan expected home to-day from Belfast ?

MARY. Yes.

BROWN. I wonder did he get the bellows sold ? There was great talking about him last night in McArns. Some said he had sold it and made a fortune. (*He breaks off abruptly on seeing that* MARY *pays no attention to him, and*

then peers over to see what she is reading.) Post cards is interesting things. Picture post cards is.

KATE. Go on out of this. We're tired hearing your gabble.

BROWN (*retreating to door and eyeing* KATE *meaningly*). The master was complaining again to me yesterday evening about the dinner he got. There's no mistake he likes his meat like myself, and right enough it was bad yesterday. I was chowing haws all evening to keep off the hunger.

KATE. And couldn't you have made it up with bread ? There's plenty of soda bread.

BROWN. Bread ? Soda bread ? Aye. There's plenty of soda, God knows. but you couldn't call it bread.

MARY (*who has been listening to the latter part of the conversation, starts suddenly up, and takes a piece of soda bread off the table and bites it hastily*). Oh, Kate !

BROWN. Aye. It's soda bread, miss, and no mistake.

KATE. You would bake it yourself, you know, miss. I throwed the most of it out yesterday, and the hens wouldn't as much as look at it. (*Seeing* MARY *is almost on the point of tears.*) Ach, never mind, Miss Mary. (*She looks at* BROWN, *who is listening.*) Go on you out of this.

BROWN. That's all the news this morning. (*He makes a grimace at* KATE *and goes out into the yard.*)

MARY. I can't understand this post card. (KATE *goes over and looks at it along with* MARY.)

> "O wad that God the gift wad gie us,
> To see oorselves as ithers see us."

What does that mean ? "How's the uncle." It's some cheeky person anyway—"from D. M.." Who could that be ?

KATE. It's not McCready, Miss, is it ?

MARY. No. That's not his writing.

KATE. Och, Miss Mary ! Do you see the picture of the Highland man dancing, and under it—" A Mackenzie Clansman." It's thon Scotch fellow sent it.

MARY. Just like the way he would do. I met him again one night we were over at the doctor's, and he was trying to make up to me all he was able.

KATE. Aye. You might do worse than take him.

MARY. I'll hand him over to you, Kate.

KATE. Ah, no, Miss. Thank you kindly all the same. Any word from Mr. Dan about the boy he was to bring you?

MARY. No. I'm not going to bother any more about boys. I'm going to keep house from this on properly. But Uncle Dan said something in his last letter about a great surprise he had for all of us.

KATE. Surprise enough it will be, and he lands home with a ha'penny in his pocket. The last time he come home he borrowed a shilling of me and niver paid me back yet. Did he sell the plans of the bellows, Miss?

MARY. He didn't say. (JOHN MURRAY *comes through yard door. He has evidently been working outside and has left his work in a hurry.*) Father, there's a letter for you. (*She hands it to him.*) A registered one too.

JOHN. Aye. So Brown was telling me. Maybe its from thon McAlenan fellow that owes me two pound for the heifer. (*He tears it open.* MARY *and* KATE *watch him with interest. His face changes as he reads, and an expression of dismay comes over it.*)

MARY (*coming closer to him*). What's the matter, father?

JOHN (*fidgeting uneasily*). Nothing, child. Nothing. (*He looks at the letter again.*) Well I'm— (*He stops short on remembering* MARY *is there.*) She's a caution.

MARY. Father. Tell me. Is it from the McMinns?

JOHN. Aye. (*Pacing up and down.*) I knowed she'd do it. I knowed she'd do it.

MARY. What?

JOHN. Sarah's taking an action against me.

MARY. An action?

JOHN. Aye. (*Consulting the letter.*) For a thousand pounds.

MARY (*awestruck*). A thousand pounds!

JOHN. Aye. Now the fat's in the fire. She says I promised to marry her and broke it off. At least, it's Andy that writes the letter, but it's her that put him up to it. I know that too well. (*Reading.*) "To Mr. John Murray. Dear Sir,—You have acted to my sister in a most ungentlemanly way, and done her much wrong, and I have put the case intil the hands of Mr. McAllen, the solicitor, who will bring it forward at the coming Assizes. If you wish, however, to avoid a scandal, we are open to settle the matter by private arrangement. Yours truly, Andrew McMinn."

MARY. That's awful, father, isn't it? (*She sits down pensively.*)

JOHN (*going over to fireplace and standing there irresolutely*). Aye. It's a terrible mess, right enough.

MARY (*brighteneng up*). Sure she wouldn't get a thousand off you, father?

KATE. There's John McArdle up by Slaney Cross got a hundred pounds took off him by wee Miss Black, the school teacher.

JOHN (*uncomfortably*). Aye. Heth now, I just call that to mind. And he never got courting at all, I believe.

KATE. It just served him right. He was always a great man for having five or six girls running after him.

JOHN. And she hadn't much of a case against him.

KATE. The school children were standing by when he asked her in a joking sort of way would she marry him, and the court took their evidence!

JOHN (*hopelessly*). Aye. Men are always terrible hard on other men where women are concerned.

KATE. And a good job it is, or half the girls would be at the church waiting, and the groom lying at home rueing his bargain. (*She goes out by yard door.*)

MARY (*going up to her father*). Father, has she a good case against you?

JOHN (*after a moment of deep thought*). No. I don't think it.

MARY. Don't worry so much then, father.

JOHN. It's the jury I'm so frightened of. They all come from the mountainy district at this Assizes, and there's not a man of them but wouldn't put a knife in me, the way I get beating them down in price at the fairs.

MARY. I don't think they'd give her fifty pounds when they see her. It's only good looking girls would get big sums like a thousand pounds.

JOHN. It's all very well, Mary, but she could dress herself to look nice enough, the same Sarah, if she liked.

MARY. She could not, indeed.

JOHN. They say, at least Brown was hinting to me, that its yon Scotch fellow, Mackenzie, has put up the McMinns to this business. He and that connection are as thick as thieves.

MARY. He mightn't be so very fond of them. When a man sends post cards to a girl he doesn't know very well he's got a wee bit of a liking for her.

JOHN. What are you talking about? I never sent her any post cards.

MARY. Father, what are you going to do?

JOHN (*despairingly*). I'm d——d if I know.

MARY. Will you defend the case?

JOHN. I don't want to go near the court at all.

MARY. Father! (*Alarmed.*) Father! Sure you wouldn't—you couldn't think of marrying her after all that row that happened? (JOHN *remains silent.*) Wouldn't you rather lose a thousand pounds and keep me, father? (JOHN *breaks a piece of soda bread morosely and eats it.*) Wouldn't you, father.

JOHN. Ah! (*He spits out the bread.*) Heaven save us, what kind of bread's that?

MARY (*taking away the bread and putting it behind her back.*) Father! Ah please, please, don't marry her anyway. Sure you won't?

JOHN (*softening*). There, there, child. I'll think about it.

BROWN (*coming in hastily*). Here's Mr. Dan coming up

the loaning, sir, that grand looking you'd hardly know him, and a big cigar in his mouth.

JOHN. Daniel back ?

MARY. Oh, I must go out and meet him. (*She goes out by yard door quickly.*)

JOHN. Had he his luggage with him ?

BROWN. Aye. He has yon big portmanteau of his, and a parcel of something or other.

JOHN. Away out and help him then, can't you ? (BROWN *goes out.*) I wonder what kept him in Belfast all this time. I suppose he's spent most of the five pounds I gave him. Like enough. I never mind him coming back yet with a ha'penny on him. (*He sits down at the fireplace and looks again at the letter.*) A thousand pounds ! And there never was a breach of promise case known where they didn't bring in a verdict for the woman. Never ! (*He becomes absorbed in thought, and as he sits ruminating* MARY *opens the door, carrying a large brown paper parcel, followed by* DANIEL. DANIEL *is dressed fairly well, and seems to be in high spirits.* BROWN *follows him carrying a portmanteau.*)

DANIEL (*brightly*). Home again, John.

JOHN (*morosely*). Aye. It was near time, I think.

DANIEL. Saw quite a number of people this time, John. A great number. They were all very much interested. Fine town, Belfast. Growing very rapidly. Wonderful place.

MARY. Take me with you when you go again, Uncle Dan, won't you ? What's in the parcel ? (*She looks at it with great curiosity.*)

DANIEL. Ah, that—that's the great secret. Mum's the word. All in good time, Mary.

MARY. It's a secret ? (*She looks at it again wonderingly.*)

DANIEL. Yes.

BROWN. Will I leave your bag here, Mr. Dan ?

DANIEL. Yes. Here's a sixpence for you. (*He hands it to* BROWN, *who salutes and goes out grinning.*)

JOHN. You're brave and free-handed with your money.

Giving the like of that bauchle sixpence. The Lord knows but we will be wanting every ha'penny we can scrape together, and soon enough.

MARY. I didn't tell Uncle Dan yet, father.

DANIEL (*seating himself near the workshop door*). Has anything happened ?

MARY. Yes. Sarah McMinn has—

JOHN. Read that letter, Daniel. (*He goes across and hands* DANIEL *the letter, and goes back to the fireplace to watch him.*)

DANIEL (*taking out his glasses and solemnly perusing the letter*). Um.

JOHN. Well ? What do you think of that ?

DANIEL (*endeavouring to appear cheerful*). Keep up a stout heart, John. You're safe enough.

JOHN. Oh, heth, I'm not so sure of that. Sure you never heard tell of a jury yet that didn't give damages against the defendant in a breach of promise case. Did you now ?

DANIEL. Tuts, man. She has no case.

JOHN. Case or no case it doesn't seem to matter. What sort of case had Jennie Black against John McArdle, of Slaney Cross ? None. What sort of case had Maggie McAndless against old William Boyd ? None at all. I was at both of them trials, and says I to Pat McAleenan—"the girl has no case at all!" But for all that they brought in a verdict for one hundred pounds against McArdle, and they put two hundred against old Boyd, and nearly broke the two of them.

DANIEL. It's very awkward this.

JOHN. Did you do anything, Daniel, about the bellows ?

DANIEL. The bellows ? Aye. (*He points at the parcel.*) A good deal, John. It's all there. But it's all not quite settled yet. A day or two more and you'll see. If all goes well I'll have a great surprise for you in a day or two.

JOHN (*disgustedly*). Ach ! I suppose you spent every ha'penny of the money, too, that I gave you ?

DANIEL. John. Another surprise for you! Those people I met and went to, put me up very cheap for the week. Very cheap. (*He produces some money.*) There's one pound ten and sixpence for you.

JOHN. What?

DANIEL. I'll keep the pound to do me to the end of the month and not ask you for any more, John, after that. That is if—well—(*He looks at the parcel.*) That thing there is all right.

JOHN (*pocketing the ten and sixpence after counting it carefully*) Daniel. I'm sorry, but there's an account of some thirty shillings I owe the McArdles, and I want to pay it the night. So if you don't mind—(*He holds out his hand.*)

DANIEL (*unwillingly*). Well, I suppose it can't be helped, John. But it leaves me just with nothing. However, there you are. (*He hands the pound over to him.* SAM BROWN *opens the yard door and peeps in cautiously.*)

JOHN (*looking at him angrily*). What ails *you* anyway?

BROWN. If you please, sir, the posty wants the account signed for that letter.

MARY. Oh, I forgot all about it. (*She picks up the receipt for the letter from the table.*) I'll sign it for you, father. (*She goes over to* BROWN, *who whispers something. She nods.*) And I'll give it to him myself. (*She goes out following* BROWN.)

JOHN. It's a serious business, this, about the McMinns.

DANIEL. You're all right, man. Wait a day or two. Take my advice. Do nothing in a hurry. Sit down and think it over the way I do when I'm working out a new idea. Don't rush things. It will all come right in the end. Just you wait and see if it doesn't.

JOHN. Would it not be better to settle before going into the court? You know I couldn't stand being pointed out to of a Sunday morning and one and another talking—"There's the man that Sarah McMinn took the breach of promise case against." No, I couldn't stand that at

all. It would be a disgrace to the Murrays for ever. I'm wondering now—— (*He pauses lost in thought.*)

DANIEL (*alarmed*). John. Surely you wouldn't—you couldn't think of going back on what you said to me. Would you ?

JOHN. I wonder, Daniel, would you mind so much after all if I married her ?

DANIEL (*in an agonised voice*). I couldn't stand it. No, John, I couldn't stay. Any other woman but that McMinn.

MARY (*appearing at the door followed by* ALICK McCREADY). Come on in, Alick.

ALICK. Good morning, Mr. Murray. How are you, Mr. Dan ? So you are back again ? We're all glad to have you back.

DANIEL. Thank you, Alick.

MARY. Father. Alick says he heard Andy McMinn talking yesterday to some one at McArdle's shop, and he was telling them all about the whole business, and blaming it all on Uncle Dan.

JOHN. And so the people are talking of me already ? Now that I come to think of it, it was your Uncle Dan, and a brave ha'penny it's going to cost me. One thousand pounds !

ALICK. Never mind, Mr. Murray. Maybe Uncle Dan will do something yet. What about the bellows ? (*Dan makes a horrified movement to stop Alick talking, but too late.*)

JOHN. Aye. Here, Daniel. I'll make a bargain with you. I'll leave you to the settling of the case, and you can find the money yourself to pay for it if you want to. And if you can't find the money, I'll marry her.

MARY. Father, surely——

JOHN. What ? That's enough about it. I would as soon do without the marrying if I could. I don't want the woman at all, but I'll marry her before she gets a ha'penny off me. So you can settle it among yourselves. You can take charge of that letter, Dan,

and make the best you can of it. (*He goes angrily out by yard door.*)

DANIEL. This is a nice mess you put me in for, Alick. What the divil made you mention the bellows ?

ALICK. I'm sorry, Mr. Dan. I wasn't thinking.

DANIEL. The sooner you start and think a bit the better. If you don't help to settle the case—(*he looks angrily at* ALICK)—well—I've a good deal of influence with somebody. (*He looks significantly at* MARY, *who is again examining the parcel.*)

ALICK. I'll do my best, Mr. Dan, to help you.

MARY. What will we do, Uncle Dan ?

DANIEL. I suppose you've no money, Alick ?

ALICK. Well, I haven't much ready money, Mr. Dan, but I could lend you up to twenty pounds at a pinch.

MARY. Twenty pounds would hardly be enough. Would it, uncle ?

ALICK. Better get hold of Andy and ask him.

DANIEL. I don't like going near that woman at all.

MARY. Alick ! Could you not slip over and ask Andy to come across ? You know what the McMinns are like. He'd come over for a shilling if he thought he'd get one. Ah, yes. You will, Alick. Won't you ?

ALICK. I'll go straight across now if you—if you——

MARY. What ?

ALICK. If you'd leave us along the road a bit.

MARY. Ach, you're a bother. (DANIEL *goes over to the table, lifts the parcel, and then goes and sits down near the fireplace.*)

ALICK. Leave us a wee bit of the way, anyway. (*He goes towards the door and beckons her. She goes out after him.*)

DANIEL (*feeling the parcel*). I'm afraid, Dan Murray, it's all U. P. this time. I'm afraid it is. (*Then an idea seems to dawn on him, and he looks at the parcel.*) Unless—unless—well—I wonder now if I—

(KATE *and* BROWN *enter through yard door.* BROWN *is carrying a bucket filled with washed potatoes.*)

KATE. There. Put it down there. You didn't know

we wanted that much, did you not? You're getting as big an old liar as Mr.—— (*She stops short on perceiving* DANIEL.)

BROWN (*looking up and then realising what had made her pause*). Aye. Go on. As who do you say, woman?

KATE (*recovering herself*). Just as big an old liar as Andy McMinn.

BROWN. Now, whist. The McMinns were aye decent folk. (*He glances across at* DANIEL, *who apparently is not listening.*) They're near people, and all that sort of thing, but once they say a thing they stick to it.

KATE. They're a lot of mean scrubs, the whole caboosh of them.

BROWN (*nudging* KATE *slyly*). I believe that once Sarah puts a price on a thing like a pig or a sow, or a hen, the divil himself couldn't beat her down in the price of it. She can beat the best dealer in the county from here to the Mourne. (DANIEL, *who has been listening uneasily, gets up and turns round to look at them.*) It's the fine cigar that you were smoking, Mr. Daniel, this morning.

DANIEL. Cigar? Yes. Yes.

BROWN. Aye. A fine cigar, sir. There was a grand smell off it. I seen you coming up by the McMinns, sir, this morning on the road from the station.

DANIEL. Yes. On the road from the station.

BROWN. You didn't see them, but I noticed Andy and Sarah coming out to the gate when you had passed them and looking after you a long time.

DANIEL. Is that so?

BROWN. Aye. A long time, sir. I suppose, like myself, they smelled the cigar. Mr. Andy, they say, is guy fond of a good cigar, and I understand that he'll be for getting a few boxes of them soon, for the sister, they say, is coming into a lot of money. It's well for the people can afford the like of them things.

KATE. Will you hold your tongue. There! I want no more of you now. You're only a nuisance in the

house anyway. Go out and clatter to somebody else. I wonder the master didn't sack you long ago.

BROWN. The master? (*He retreats slowly to the yard door.*) The master knows to keep a good man when he gets one. He doesn't part soft with either good men or money. God bless him. (*He goes out.*)

KATE. Will I make you a drop of tea, Mr. Dan? You'll be tired travelling.

DANIEL. It's hard to eat anything, Kate, when I'm worried. (*Despairingly.*) I don't think there's another man living has the same worries as I have. Something awful! Where's the pen and ink, I wonder?

KATE. There's some here on the dresser, Miss Mary was using it to-day. (*She takes it over from the dresser to the table.* DANIEL *rises and goes over and sits down and begins slowly to write.*) Cheer up, Mr. Daniel. Sure you sold the plans of the bellows anyway. Didn't you, sir? They had word up at the McAleenans the other night that you got two thousand for it.

DANIEL (*astonished*). Eh? They said that.

KATE. Aye. To be sure. McAndless told McArdle, and he told Smith the postman, and the postman told the McAleenans, and said he had seen letters about it. And McAleenan was up in McMinns the other night and told them, and I believe you never saw such an astonished crowd of people in all your lives.

DANIEL. He told the McMinns?

KATE. Aye, last night I think it was.

DANIEL. Last night? (*He looks at the letter.*) Yesterday was the 14th, wasn't it? Aye. It was. I wonder did they believe McAleenan?

KATE. I don't think they know right what to make of it. And yon Scotchman was there at the time, and mind you, Mr. Dan, they say he looked quite serious when he heard it, and said such things as that happened many's a time.

DANIEL (*incredulously*). Mackenzie said that?

KATE. Aye. You know, I think its maybe because he has a wee notion of Miss Mary, sir.

DANIEL. It's quite possible. Quite possible. A nice wee girl is Mary. Far too good for the half of them about these parts. (*He takes up the parcel, pen, and ink, and paper, and goes across into the workshop.*)

KATE (*looking after him*). Poor creature. I'm feared he's for the road again if he doesn't worry out some way for himself. And God knows he's the one best fitted for it. (MARY *enters.*) Well, did you see him off comfortably ?

MARY. Who ?

KATE. Alick McCready.

MARY. Kate. I wish you'd mind your own business.

KATE. It's a sore time I have in this house minding my own and every other bodies business.

MARY. Kate. He said I couldn't bake a cake to save my life. I'll just show him that I can, and you're not to help me, mind you. I'm going to do it all myself.

KATE. Very well, Miss. Anything for a bit of peace say I.

MARY. Where's that recipe book ? (KATE *hands it to her, and she begins to pore over the pages.*) "Queen pudding."

KATE. Ah, Miss Mary, don't be trying that again. Do you not mind how bad your poor old uncle was after it ?

MARY. What's this Sarah McMinn was so good at ? "Plum cakes." I'll try a plum cake.

KATE (*hopelessly and to herself*). She's clean daft.

MARY. (*consulting the book*). I'll want eggs and flour and currants and suet and—

KATE. I think if I was you, I'd try something more easy.

MARY. But plum cakes are easy.

KATE. That's what I used to think till I tried one. I give it up, Miss. It's beyond me altogether.

MARY. I think that you believe I couldn't bake anything. Where's the flour ?

KATE. There's none in the house, Miss Mary.

MARY. What ?

KATE. You mind it was all used up this morning on account of them cakes you were doing that turned out bad.

MARY. Go down to McArdles, Kate, and get a quarter stone on account.

KATE. Your da told me this morning, Miss Mary, that I wasn't to get any more from McArdles or any other place unless he gives me an order for it. Do you not mind?

MARY (*dejectedly*). So he did. I had forgotten.

KATE. Aye. Quite so, Miss. (*She sits down contentedly.*)

MARY. I wonder is Uncle Dan about?

KATE. Aye. He's in his workshop, Miss.

MARY (*going over and knocking at door of workshop*). Uncle Dan!

DANIEL (*without*). Yes.

MARY. Please, Uncle Dan.

DANIEL (*appearing at door*). Well, Mary?

MARY. Uncle Dan, could you give me sixpence?

DANIEL (*fumbling in his pockets*). Sixpence? Sixpence, Mary? Bless your wee heart. Here. Here's a two shilling bit. But Mary, mum's the word. Don't tell John I gave it to you.

MARY. No. Thank you, uncle. (DANIEL *goes in again.*) There, Kate, quick as you can and don't stop to talk to anybody. Sure you won't? (*She hands* KATE *the money and takes up the recipe book.*)

KATE. I'm not dirty looking—am I, Miss Mary?

MARY (*absorbed in the book*). No. You'll do grand. Flour, currants, raisins—we have all that—suet—I wonder—

KATE. Ach! You and your currants. Could you not tell a body was her face clean?

MARY. It's lovely. Hurry, Kate. (KATE *shrugs her shoulders disgustedly, and goes out by yard door.*) Flour, currants—— (*She goes over to the workshop door and listens*)—raisins—(*A sound as of a blast blowing can be heard.* MARY *becomes intensely interested, and, throwing aside the book,*

kneels down and puts her head to the keyhole.) He's actually got something to work. (*She peeps in.*) He has, indeed. (*She laughs, knocks loudly at the door, and then runs to the other side of the kitchen.* DANIEL *opens the door and cautiously peeps out.*) Uncle Danny! Ha! Ha! Uncle Danny! (*Dancing up and down in front of the fireplace.*) Uncle Dan's a wonderful man! Uncle Dan's a wonderful man!

DANIEL (*amazed*). What's all this?

MARY. I'm a cleverer girl than you think, Uncle Dan! I know your great surprise. I've found it out. (*In a disappointed manner.*) And you never told me! (*Pouting.*) I think you might have told me anyway. It wasn't at all nice of you to keep it secret from me.

DANIEL. I just wanted to give you all a surprise, Mary.

MARY. And you've actually got it to work! That's splendid, uncle, isn't it? Father will be awful proud when he hears about it. And you did it all yourself, uncle?

DANIEL. Well, I took those plans, Mary, to a handy chap, an acquaintance of mine, and we talked a long time over it, and he made it out according to my design. I'm not sure—I think it works all right. Is there a screw driver about, I wonder, Mary?

MARY. I don't know. And did you get it sold, uncle?

DANIEL. No, Mary, but I have hopes—great hopes.

MARY. Do you think you'd get more than a thousand pounds for it?

DANIEL. Don't know, Mary, don't know. Very hard to know these things. I must have a look for that screw driver. I think John had it last working at something in the parlour. (*He goes out by door to inner rooms.*)

MARY. I wonder would it really sell for a thousand pounds? (*Knocking at yard door.*) Come in. (DONAL MACKENZIE *opens the door and comes in.*)

MACKENZIE. Fine afternoon, Miss Murray.

MARY (*coldly*). Good day to you.

MACKENZIE. I'm going off to Scotland verra soon, and

I thought I would call over to see you before I went off. You're no angry, are you ?

MARY. No. (MACKENZIE *seats himself at the table.*)

MACKENZIE. Did you get a post card ?

MARY. I got some silly thing this morning that I tore up.

MACKENZIE. I'm sorry. I'm verra fond of you, Mary.

MARY. Miss Murray, please.

MACKENZIE. A girl like you is lost here, you know. Now, if you were a Scotch lassie you would have great time enjoying yourself. In a place like Greenock we have a theatre, and we have a music hall and a cinematograph show on Saturdays and trains to Glasgow. You could have a grand time in Scotland.

MARY. Do you really like me, Mr. Mackenzie ?

MACKENZIE. Verra much. Indeed I—

MARY. Well. Look here. I would like you very, very much too, if you——

MACKENZIE. If I what, bonnie Mary ?

MARY. I'd even let you call me Mary, and write to me if you wanted to, if you would do me a favour.

MACKENZIE. What's the favour ?

MARY. Uncle Dan has brought home his fan bellows, and it works.

MACKENZIE (*laughs*). The fan bellows ! I think he'll never make much of a fortune of his fan bellows.

MARY. Do you ever examine new inventions ?

MACKENZIE. Aye. I'm a specialist on that, you know. I'm the writer of the inventions column in the Scottish ——

MARY. Yes. Yes. That's all right. I know. Are all the inventions you write about good things ?

MACKENZIE. Eh ? Ninety-nine per cent. rotten, lassie. Ninety-nine per cent. perfectly rotten. People don't invent a reciprocating piston that works every day in the week, or a fan bellows either.

MARY. But if you liked the inventor you could do him a good turn all the same ?

MACKENZIE. Aye. I did that often.

MARY. Then could you do a good turn for Uncle Dan? For me!

MACKENZIE. Eh?

MARY. Uncle Dan has a fan bellows in that workshop. Go in and look at it, and examine it, and if you like me even a wee bit, you —— (DANIEL *re-enters. He stops short on seeing* MACKENZIE, *and seems to become very uncomfortable.*) Uncle Dan! Mr. Mackenzie's going to examine your bellows.

DANIEL. I don't allow everybody to go and look at it. No. I refuse. It's my property and no one else's.

MARY. Uncle Dan. (*She looks at him meaningly.*) Mr. Mackenzie has promised to give his opinion on it.

DANIEL. It's not protected yet by patent.

MACKENZIE. Andy McMinn is coming over, Mr. Murray. He has got orders from his sister to settle the case for her. Are you going to pay the money?

DANIEL. That is a matter of my own deciding. (MARY *goes over to her uncle and whispers to him.*)

MACKENZIE. Verra well. I may go. (*To* MARY.) I would have done you that good turn, Miss Murray; but there's no enmity between us. And—(*lowering his voice*)—I hope you get the best of the McMinns in the bargain. Don't give in, Mr. Murray, easy. Take my tip. I'm from the stables, you know. (*He laughs knowingly.*)

MARY. Here's Andy now (*she looks out through the window*), and Alick's with him. (*She opens the door*, ANDY MCMINN *and* MCCREADY *enter.* MCCREADY *glances at* MARY *and* MACKENZIE, *and goes over sulkily to the fireplace.* ANDY *advances awkwardly towards* DANIEL.)

DANIEL (*genially*). Good afternoon, Andy.

ANDY. Good afternoon. (*He looks at* MACKENZIE, *who nods curtly.*) I suppose you know I've power to settle the case.

DANIEL. Well, you wrote the letter, and so, in point of law, I think it is you who should look after all this unfortunate business. Believe me, Andy, I sympathise with you. I do indeed. (MARY *and* MACKENZIE *become*

absorbed in conversation near the table. ALICK MCCREADY *stands at the fireplace looking at them and unable to conceal his jealousy, makes sundry odd noises to distract* MARY'S *attention. She pretends not to hear him.*) I have your letters here. (*He searches in his pocket and produces it.*) Yes. One thousand pounds. Do you not think that a trifle high?

ANDY Well. You know we could have as easily claimed two thousand, but we didn't like to break you altogether; so we just said that a thousand would come pretty near it.

MACKENZIE. Mr. Daniel, may I look at the bellows?

MARY. Uncle Dan, I'm sure you won't object. (*She makes a gesture as if asking him to assent.*)

DANIEL (*looking hard at her, and then seeming to understand what she is about*). Yes. Yes. I'll thrash out the matter here with Andy. (MACKENZIE *goes across into the workshop, followed by* MARY. MCCREADY *sits down disconsolately at the fireplace and begins to smoke his pipe moodily.*) A thousand pounds is impossible. Absolutely out of the question.

MCCREADY (*to himself*). Ach. She only torments me.

DANIEL (*looking over wonderingly*). Eh? (MCCREADY *makes no response, but sits with his back to the two of them.*) People behave strangely sometimes, Andy. Very strangely. Now to go on with our business. I don't think, in the first case, that this was an affair of the heart, as the Frenchmen say.

ANDY. Eh?

DANIEL. You don't understand French? Of course not. No. It wasn't a love affair, I mean. I don't think Sarah was in love with John, was she?

ANDY (*hesitatingly*). Well—indeed, now, I don't know that she was.

DANIEL. No. We're all aware of that. He was just what we'd call a likely man. That's all.

ANDY. Aye. He would have been a good match for her.

DANIEL. Yes. Quite so, Andy. (*He makes notes in*

a pocket book.) Nothing like notes, Andy. Now, so much for the love part of the business. They never exchanged letters ?

ANDY. No. No letters.

DANIEL. Of course in a breach of promise letters are a great help. A great help. I'm very glad, however, just for your sister's sake, that she never wrote any to John. Imagine them reading out the love letters in the open court, and all the servant boys gaping and laughing.

ANDY. It's not nice, right enough. It's one thing I wouldn't like.

DANIEL. Well. No love. No letters. Next thing. He never courted her ?

ANDY. Well, he came over and sat in the house a few nights.

DANIEL. Yes. No doubt. But hadn't he always some message on business to transact with you ? Loan of a plough or a horse, or something like that ?

ANDY (*uneasily*). That's so, of course.

DANIEL. Ah, yes.

ANDY. But I seen him with his arm round her the night of the social at the schoolhouse.

DANIEL. Andy. That's a wee failing of John's. I often warned him about doing that sort of thing indiscriminately. A bit of a ladies' man, John, in his way. I saw him do the same nonsense four or five times that night with other girls. John likes to think himself a bit of a gay dog, you know. It's not right—I don't think myself it's a bit proper to put your arm round a girl's waist on every occasion, but sometimes it's quite allowable. A night like a social, for instance.

ANDY. Aye. Of course a social's different.

DANIEL. Certainly. Well, now. No love, no letters, no courting, no photographs exchanged ? (*He looks at* ANDY *inquiringly.*) No photographs exchanged. (*He notes it down.*) No ring ? In fact, Andy, no nothing.

ANDY. But he proposed to her right enough.

DANIEL. Who said so?

ANDY (*astonished*). What? Do you mean to deny he didn't?

DANIEL. My dear Andy, I don't know. There was no one there but the two, I suppose, when he asked her. There's only her word for it.

ANDY. He wouldn't deny it himself?

DANIEL. Well. That depends on whether he really asked her to marry him of course. And it's not likely that John would be inclined if his memory was at all bad—it is a bad memory he has, you know. He forgets often to return your ploughs and that sort of thing.

ANDY (*blankly*). Aye. He has a bad memory.

DANIEL. Yes. Just so. And the fact that a verdict of one thousand pounds would hang on it would hardly make it any better. Would it? You've a bad case against us, Andy. A rotten case! In fact, looking over the whole thing carefully, do you really believe you'd make even a ten pound note out of us?

ANDY (*despairingly*). I wish Sarah had come and settled the case herself.

DANIEL. Ah, no. You've a better head, Andy, for seeing the sensible side of a thing, far better. (MARY *comes out of the workshop smiling gaily.*) Well?

MARY. Uncle Dan, he's delighted with it.

ANDY. What with? The bellows?

MARY. Yes. Go in, Andy, till you see it.

ANDY. Is it true, Daniel, you were offered two thousand for it?

DANIEL. We'll just go in and have a look at it. (ANDY *and he go into workshop.*)

MARY (*looking across at* ALICK). What's the matter?

ALICK. Nothing. I'm going home. (*He goes across to the yard door.*)

MARY. Alick!

McCREADY. Goodbye.

MARY. And I was going to go to all the trouble of baking a big plum cake for you, you big ungrateful thing.

McCready (*stopping at the door*). I know what your plum cakes would be like. (*He opens the door and stops again before going out.*)

Mary. Well, get that big, ugly Maggie Murphy to bake them for you then.

McCready (*looking out through door and then coming inside again*). I say, here's Kate and your father coming and a load of flour.

Mary (*in a frightened voice*). Kate and father ?

McCready. He seems to be in a bit of a temper.

Mary (*in a frightened voice*). He's caught her with the flour !

McCready (*laughing*). Flour ? Aye—she's carrying about three stone of it ! Boys, but that would make a powerful pudding !

Mary. It was to have been the nicest one I could have baked.

McCready (*coming in and going over to her*). Mary !

Mary. What ?

McCready. You wouldn't come to my house where there would be no stint of flour or raisins or anything else, and I'd eat all you cooked for me no matter if I was dying after it.

Mary. Go to your house !

Alick. Aye. Look here, wee girl. I got this —— (*He fumbles and produces a ring.*) Let me put that on your wee finger, won't you ?

Mary. Oh, Alick, what a lovely wee ring. (*She allows him to put it on her finger, and is shyly kissing him when* John *enters, followed by* Kate, *who is trying vainly to stop a leak in the bag of flour which she is carrying.* Kate *goes to the dresser and places the bag on it.*)

John (*severely to* Mary). Mary. Did you send her for more flour ?

Mary (*meekly*). Yes, father.

John. And didn't I leave word there was no more to be got without my orders ? (Mary *hangs her head.*) It's lamentable the waste in this house ! I was just

looking at the pass book last night, and you'd think this house was a bakery to see the amount of flour comes into it.

MARY (*submissively*). I'm sorry, father.

JOHN. When I was out on the road, I seen a trail of flour leading up our loaning, and says I to myself, Jeminy, father, are they getting some more! So I followed up the mark and just caught up on her coming through the gate.

MARY (*a little defiantly*). It's paid for, Kate, anyway. Isn't it?

KATE. It is, Miss. (*She busies herself putting the flour into a box, and then slips out during the next speech.*)

JOHN. Eh? Who give you the money?

MARY (*going over to her father and whispering*). Uncle Dan is in there, father, with Andy McMinn and Mr. Mackenzie, the Scotch engineer, looking at his bellows.

JOHN (*amazed*). Eh? Andy McMinn? Is Dan settling the case?

MARY. I believe he'll do it yet.

JOHN (*admiringly*). He has a great head on him, Daniel.

MACKENZIE (*coming out from workshop and going over to* MARY). Mary, I'm sorry. It's such a rotten thing that—— (*He sees* JOHN.) How are you, Mr. Murray.

JOHN. Fine day.

MARY (*appealingly*). Mr. Mackenzie, what did you say to Andy about it?

MACKENZIE. What did I say? Oh, ma conscience—I said it was a grand thing. (DANIEL and ANDY MCMINN *come in from workshop.*)

ANDY (*nervously*). Brave day, John.

JOHN. Aye. It is.

ANDY. Sarah gave me power to settle the case.

JOHN. I'm glad to hear it.

MACKENZIE. I tell you what it is, Mr. Daniel Murray. It's a good thing that—a right good thing, and I'll make you an offer for it.

ANDY (*eagerly*). What's it worth ?

MACKENZIE (*with a look at* MARY). It's worth—it's worth more than all the damages your sister will get from Mr. Murray.

DANIEL (*suddenly*). I tell you what it is, Andy, and believe me when I tell you, I'm sacrificing a great deal. I'll make a deal with you. Instead of a lump sum cash down, I'll hand over all the rights and royalties of that same bellows to you to settle the case.

ANDY (*dubiously*). I—I don't know.

DANIEL. You will have all the expense of the law, the bad name that your sister will be having over the head of being in a breach of promise, and all the expense of solicitors and lawyers. Then, after that, trying to get the money out of us, and, mind you, we will fight you to the last ditch. Won't we, John ?

JOHN. Aye.

DANIEL. There now. What do you say, Mr. Mackenzie ?

MACKENZIE. I tell you what it is, Mr. Murray. I'll make you an offer for ——

ANDY (*hastily*). I'll take your offer, Daniel.

DANIEL. One second. I drew up a wee agreement for you to sign, and I'll fetch the bellows. (*He goes into the workshop.*)

JOHN. Andy, I think ——

MARY. I think Uncle Dan's a fool to throw away the thing that way. I do indeed. (DANIEL *comes out with the parcel and the pen, ink and paper.*)

DANIEL. Just sign your name to that, Andy. It's a sort of agreement to settle the case—you can read it for yourself. (*He hands a sheet of paper to* ANDY *with the pen.*) It's to show that the whole thing is fixed up to the satisfaction of everybody. (ANDY *looks at it and then signs.*) Ah. Good! Now, Alick, and you, Mr. Mackenzie, just witness it and the date. (*They both sign.*) And now, Andy, there's your bellows. (ANDY *looks at it, and then takes it under his arm.*) And may

you have the best of luck with it. (ANDY *looks wonderingly at the parcel in his arm and moves slowly towards the door.*)

MACKENZIE. Noo, my reward, Miss Murray—Mary rather. (*He goes forward and she stretches out her hand for him to shake, when he notices the ring, and stops short.*)

JOHN. I hope you're satisfied, Andy.

ANDY. I'm just wondering, Mr. Mackenzie, do you think ——

MACKENZIE. I think nothing for a year. I'll—I'll—I'm for Scotland in the morning. (*He goes out morosely through the door.*)

DANIEL. There, Andy. There's company home for you, and good luck to you. It's a sad heart I'll have this night.

ANDY. I'm wondering what—(*He goes to the door.*) Ach! She couldn't do better herself. No ring nor nothing and a thousand pound bellows. (*He wanders out abstractedly.* DANIEL *closes the door after him and looks sadly but triumphantly across at* JOHN. ALICK *and* MARY *go to the window together and look out after* ANDY.

DANIEL. Well, John?

JOHN (*with a sigh of intense relief and gratitude*). Dan, I've said it before, and I'll say it again, you've a great head on you, Daniel.

(CURTAIN.)

THE TURN OF THE ROAD

TO

LEWIS PURCELL

In remembrance of his kindly aid and criticism

CHARACTERS

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN, *A farmer.*

MRS. GRANAHAN, *His wife.*

SAMUEL JAMES, ROBBIE JOHN, } *Their sons.*

ELLEN, *Their daughter.*

THOMAS GRANAHAN, *Father of Wm. John Granahan.*

JOHN GRAEME, *A farmer.*

JANE, *His daughter.*

MR. TAYLOR, *A Creamery Manager.*

A TRAMP FIDDLER.

The action takes place throughout in the Kitchen of William John Granahan's house in the County of Down.

TIME ..... *The present day.*

A month elapses between Scenes I. and II.

THE TURN OF THE ROAD

A PLAY IN TWO SCENES AND AN EPILOGUE.

SCENE I.: *A farm kitchen of the present day. Door at back, opening to yard, and window with deal table on which are lying dishes and drying cloths with basin of water. A large crock under table. A dresser with crockery, &c., stands near to another door which opens into living rooms. Opposite there is a fireplace with projecting breasts, in which a turf fire is glowing. Time—about eight of a summer evening in July.* MRS. GRANAHAN *and* ELLEN *are engaged at table washing and drying the plates after the supper.* THOMAS GRANAHAN, *the grandfather, is seated at fireplace, and has evidently just finished his stirabout. The strains of a quaint folk-air played on a violin sound faintly from the inner room.*

MRS. GRANAHAN. Is that the whole of them now, Ellen ?

ELLEN. Yes, that's all now but one. (*She goes across to grandfather and lifts the plate.*) Have you finished, grand-da ?

GRANDFATHER. Yes, dearie, I have done. (*He pauses and fumbles for his pipe, &c.*) Isn't that a fiddle I'm hearing ?

ELLEN. Yes. Robbie is playing the fiddle in the low room.

MRS. GRANAHAN (*arranging plates on dresser and turning round*). I wish some one would stop that boy's fool

nonsense wi' his fiddle. He's far too fond of playing. It would stand him better to mind his work. (*Calls.*) Robbie! (*Louder.*) D'you hear me, Robbie?

ELLEN. Oh, let the boy be, mother. It's the first time I've heard him at it this week.

GRANDFATHER. Och, aye! Let the boy enjoy himself. You're only young wanst you know, Mary.

ELLEN. I think it must be a great thing to be a great musician. Sometimes I believe Robbie should try his luck with that fiddle of his. Somehow I know—I feel he *is* a genius at it.

MRS. GRANAHAN. What notions you do have to be sure. To think of a big grown man like Robbie John spending his lifetime at an old fiddle. (*Sharply.*) Blathers and nonsense! It's time that boy was out looking at the cattle. (*Calls.*) Are you there, Robbie? (*Louder.*) Robbie John.

ROBBIE JOHN (*the fiddle ceases suddenly and he comes and stands with it in his hand at the door*). Aye?

MRS. GRANAHAN. You'd better go down to the low field and see the cattle haven't broken through into Aura Boyd's corn. You couldn't keep them beasts in when the flies gets at them.

ROBBIE JOHN. Just one second till I try this again.

MRS. GRANAHAN. Now, will you go when I tell you. You and your ould fiddle. It'll be the death of you yet. Mind what I say.

ROBBIE JOHN (*coming through door and standing there*). Bad cess to the cattle and Aura Boyd.

GRANDFATHER. He's a tarr'ble unneighbourly man.

MRS. GRANAHAN. He's a cross-grained man right enough, but it wouldn't do to have the cattle tramping and eating his corn.

ROBBIE JOHN. I was down there only ten minutes ago when you sent me, and they were eating there quite peaceable.

MRS. GRANAHAN. Now, will you go Robbie John, when your mother wants you. Aura Boyd sent over

here this forenoon to say if that Kerry cow broke into his field again he'd have the law agin us.

ROBBIE JOHN. Och, he's a cross ould cratur. Sure, she had only one foot through the hedge when he turned her. (*Seeing his mother is impatient.*) All right; I'm away. *He goes back into room, leaves fiddle there, comes into kitchen again and goes out by door to yard.*)

MRS. GRANAHAN. He's as ill to drive as the ould mare to meeting a Sundays. (*She goes and looks through door into room.*) Look at the time it is and your father and Samuel James never back yet, Ellen. They're terrible late of coming.

ELLEN. Och, I suppose they've met some dealer at the fair and are driving a hard bargain as usual.

GRANDFATHER. I wonner if they got that foal red off their hands yet. It'll be a job I'm thinking. He was a miserable baste, and tarr'ble broken in the wind.

ELLEN. Och, trust father to make that all right. I heard Mr. Taylor, of the creamery, say that father could sell ou skim milk for cream better than any man he knew.

MRS. GRANAHAN (*seating herself at chair beside table at back*). Oh, aye. It's easy for him to talk, but money's hard of making, and if people's soft it's their own fault. Only I hope they've no taken any drink.

GRANDFATHER. It's no fault in a good man if he does take a half-un.

MRS. GRANAHAN. Now, don't you be starting to talk that way. It's always the way with them dailers. Muddle the good man's head with whiskey, and then *do* him.

ELLEN. They'll not muddle father much, I'm thinking. Besides, Samuel James is with him.

GRANDFATHER. Samuel James is a cunning rascal.

MRS. GRANAHAN. Don't you miscall my son, Mr. Granahan. He's a canny good son and works hard, and is worth more than half-a-dozen men like Robbie John. They'll not put their finger in his eye. (*Going to the window.*) Bless my heart, there's that sow among the kale. Shoo! (*She goes out and is heard shouting.*)

ELLEN (*laughing*). That poor sow! It has the times of it!

(ROBBIE JOHN *enters and sits down near his grandfather.*

GRANDFATHER. Well, son, what about the cattle?

ROBBIE JOHN (*weariedly*). Och, they're all right. I knowed they'd be all right. It's always the way.

GRANDFATHER. (*soothingly*). They are a terrible newsance, indeed, Robbie.

ROBBIE JOHN. But that's not what troubles me. Why can't mother leave me alone for just a few minutes till I .get some time to myself at the fiddle. I never touch it but I'm taken away and sent off somewhere.

ELLEN (*seating herself at chair beside Robbie John*). Don't be cross with her, Robbie, dear. She's anxious about the cattle.

ROBBIE JOHN. But, Ellen, look here. Any time I can get to have just a tune on that fiddle some one is sure to take me away from it. Father sends me out to mend gaps that were mended, or cut turf that was cut, or fodder horses that were foddered. And when he's away and I might have some chance, mother does the same. Here I've been working for the past week, day in and day out, and the very first chance I get I must run after the cattle or something. (*Despondently.*) Nobody has any feeling for me here at all.

GRANDFATHER. Now, now, Robbie. It's all for your own good, son, she does it.

ELLEN. And we feel for him, don't we, grand-da? You mustn't look so cross, Robbie. You know that they think you're too much wrapped up in that fiddle of yours, and they want to break you off it.

ROBBIE JOHN (*determinedly*). That they never will. Never.

GRANDFATHER (*gazing amusedly at Robbie John*). Sowl, Robbie, you look like one of them prize fighting men ye see up in the town.

ELLEN. I wish Jennie Graeme seen you with that face. You wouldn't get your arm round her so easy then; would he, grand-da?

GRANDFATHER. A bonny wee girl she is, and has a fine farm and land coming till her. (*Aside.*) Boys a dear, but them musicians gets the fine weemin.

ROBBIE JOHN. Aye. Creamery managers gets them too, grand-da, an odd time.

GRANDFATHER. Indeed, that Taylor man will get a body can cook sowans anyway.

ELLEN (*looking through window*). Here's mother.

MRS. GRANAHAN (*enters and sits down exhausted on chair at side of table next door*). That sow is a torment. I just had her out and back she doubles again. She just has me fair out of wind turning her out.

ROBBIE JOHN (*rising and making toward door into room*). I can go and have some practising now.

MRS. GRANAHAN. Robbie John, I seen the carts coming up the loaning. Your father will be in in no time. He'll no be pleased to see you han'ling that (*pointing to the fiddle*) just when he comes back. (*Starts up as if suddenly reminded.*) I must go and get them eggs counted. (*Goes out again through door to yard.*)

ELLEN. Aye, Robbie, don't take it. He'll just think you've been playing it all the time he was away. And he's always that cross after markets you couldn't stand him.

ROBBIE JOHN (*sitting down again*). You're right. I don't want another talking to like the last one; but it's hard. (*He takes up a stick from fuel beside fireplace and starts whittling it. The rattle of carts is heard.* SAMUEL JAMES *passes the window and walks in. He has the appearance of a man partly drunk and inclined to be talkative.*)

ELLEN. Well, how did the fair go off? (SAMUEL JAMES *takes off his overcoat, flings it on back of chair beside dresser, reels, and sits down heavily.*) Ah, you've been taking a drop as usual.

SAMUEL JAMES (*smiling cheerfully*). The fair? Oh,

it was great value. Sure, grand-da, he sould the foal for thirty pounds!

GRANDFATHER (*delightedly*). Boys a dear, but William John Granahan bates the devil. And who took her?

SAMUEL JAMES. There was a cavalryman bought her. Boys, but da is the hard man to plaze! We stopped at MucAlanan's on the way home and met William John McKillop there, and he tould the ould man he was a fool to let a good horse go at that price, for he was looking all roads to give him thirty pounds for it, only he couldn't get in time for the sale.

GRANDFATHER (*incredulously*). Who did you say? McKillop?

SAMUEL JAMES (*laughing*). Aye.

ROBBIE JOHN (*smiling*). Sure McKillop hasn't two sov'rins in the wide world. He was only taking a rise out of da.

SAMUEL JAMES. Sure I knowed the ould yahoo hadn't the price of a nanny-goat. But of course da took it all in for gospel. And me sitting listening to him telling ould McKillop what a grand action the foal had and the shoulders the baste had, and the way it could draw thirty hundred up Killainey hill without a pech.

GRANDFATHER (*chuckling*). William John Granahan makes a tarr'ble fine Sunday school teacher.

SAMUEL JAMES (*grinning*). But to see ould McKillop sitting there as solemn as a judge, drinking it all in as if gospel and winking at me on the sly, the ould rascal, and cursing his luck at losing such a bargain.

(*The voice of* WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN *can be heard inviting some one to come on. The strains of a fiddle played by uncertain but unmistakeably professional hands, sound without.*)

ELLEN (*looking out through window into yard*). Who's that father has got with him, Samuel James? Such a dirty-looking rascal!

SAMUEL JAMES (*chuckling*). Da got a hoult of him at Buckna cross roads, and right or wrong he'd have him

home wi' him to show Robbie John what fiddling brings a man till.

ELLEN (*severely*). It's my mind that you and father have stayed too long in the public-house, Samuel James. (WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN *and* TRAMP *fiddler can be seen outside window.*) Look at them—coming in! Wait till mother sees the pair of them!

(WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN *comes in leading a ragged-looking bearded tramp with an old fiddle tucked under his arm.*)

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. Now we're hame, and we'll get a drop to drink and a bite to eat, Mr. Fiddler. (*He goes over to fireplace and stands with his back to the fire.*) Take a seat at the fire and warm yourself. (*No one offers a seat to the tramp, who stands puzzled looking and swaying in a drunken manner in the kitchen.*) Ellen, get a drop of tay and give this poor misguided cratur something to eat.

(ELLEN *evidently disapproves of the tramp and does not offer to obey. The* GRANDFATHER *rises in disgust and moves his chair nearer the fireplace away from the tramp.*)

TRAMP (*to* ELLEN). Your pardon, noble lady, I intrude. Your pardon, signor, I incommode you. Times change and so do men. Ladies and gentlemen, behold in me the one time famous leader of the Blue Bohemian Wind and String Band, that had the honour of appearing before all the crowned heads of Europe.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. God bless me, d'you say so, mister? D'ye hear that, Robbie John? There's a fiddler for you and see what comes of it.

TRAMP. Perhaps with your permission I may venture to play you a few extracts from my repertoire. I can play to suit all tastes from a simple country ballad to a concerto by Brahms or the great Russian composer Tschaikouski.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN (*open-mouthed*). Them Rooshians has the tarr'ble names!

TRAMP. Firstly I shall play that touching little ballad I heard Monsieur here warble so sweetly as we rolled homeward on his chariot. If I play, he accompanies me with voice. N'est ce pas, Monsieur ?

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN (*nervously*). Is your mother out, Ellen ?

ELLEN. She's looking after the hens, I think. She won't hear you.

(WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN *starts singing two verses of a folk song, the tramp accompanying meanwhile with fiddle, always putting in an extra flourish. The rest all join, even the grandfather beats time with a stick. The door opens and* MRS. GRANAHAN *appears seemingly astonished at the uproar. All suddenly cease singing except the tramp, who goes on playing. He suddenly notices the cessation.*

TRAMP. Bravo. A most exquisite little air and beautifully rendered. (*He stops short on seeing* MRS. GRANAHAN, *who stands glaring at him.*) Your pardon, madam. You are the mistress, I take it, of this most noble and hospitable house.

MRS. GRANAHAN (*ignoring him, and going to centre, where she looks angrily at* WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN). You should be well ashamed of yourself, William John Granahan. What will they say about you in the Session I wonder next Sabbath Day. D'you think my house is a home for all the dirt and scum of the countryside ?

TRAMP. Your pardon, madam. You owe me an apology. Appearances belie me, but scum I am not. I was at one time the well known and justly famous leader of the Blue Bohemian Wind and String—

MRS. GRANAHAN. Wind and string fiddlesticks. Out you go. Out you will go. I want no tramps in here upsetting my house and making it the talk of the neighbours. Out you go at once.

TRAMP (*with drunken pride*). I thrust my company on no man or woman uninvited.

MRS. GRANAHAN. Out you go. I want no excuses.

Put him out of this, Samuel James. The drunken wretch coming in here. A nice place you'd have it, William Granahan, with your fine company.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. I brought him home here as a tarr'ble and awful warning to Robbie John what this sort of an occupation brings a man till. You see him, Robbie John. There's you're great fiddling for you. Be warned in time.

ROBBIE JOHN (*the* TRAMP *moves to the door.* ROBBIE JOHN *rises and goes across to him and taps him on the shoulder*). Here. (*Slips him money.*) God be with you, poor wandering soul.

TRAMP. Sir, I thank you. (*With a drunken confidence.*) Perhaps I could yet please your ears with a romanza which I composed myself—

MRS. GRANAHAN. Away with you out of this. We want none of your music here.

SAMUEL JAMES (*to* TRAMP). Why don't you give up playing that fiddle of yours and turn your hand to honest work?

TRAMP (*proudly*). Desert my fiddle. The fiddle presented to me at Vienna by my orchestra! A genuine old Cremona 200 years old! Rather would I wander in Hades for ever. Never! Though cruel words stab and wound me. (*Half sobbing.*) Farewell. (*He blunders out.*)

(*A silence. Then the strains of a melancholy air like a serenade come from outside. It slowly dies away in the distance.* ROBBIE JOHN *moves forward as if to go out.*)

MRS. GRANAHAN (*sharply*). Robbie John. Where are you going? Don't dare to leave the house. My son going out to keep company with the likes of that dirty rapscallion.

ROBBIE JOHN. Ah, mother, pity the poor wretch. Did you not see the tears in his eyes for all his fine talk? I should like to know more about him.

SAMUEL JAMES. If you went to the sergeant at the

barrack, I warrant ye he could tell you more about him. (*He bends down as if to catch the sound of the fiddling which grows very faint.*) Listen! (ROBBIE JOHN *moves to door and opens it.*)

MRS. GRANAHAN (*angrily*). Where are you going?

ROBBIE JOHN (*raptly*). Listen. (*The fiddling ceases and he quickly goes out.*)

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN (*good naturedly*). Well, Mary, the foal's sould at last.

MRS. GRANAHAN. I've a crow to pluck with you over that same foal, William Granahan. I suppose they did you as usual.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN (*angrily*). Nine and thirty year ha'e I gone till market, and no man, woman, child, dog or divil ever got the better of me in a bargain yet, and right well you know it. (*With pride.*) I sould the foal for thirty pounds, not a ha'penny less.

MRS. GRANAHAN (*doubtfully*). I hope you have it all with you.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. I have it all but two shillings and wan penny.

MRS. GRANAHAN. And can you account for them?

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. Woman dear, would you ha'e me go and come to market without a ha'penny in my pocket? Have some gumption about ye. (*In a loud angry voice.*) I'm danged but the next time I make a good bargain I'll go and have a week to myself in Newcastle or Belfast. I'm young enow yet.

MRS. GRANAHAN. There. Stop your fool talk in front of the childre and go and change your clothes.

GRANDFATHER. It was a good price indeed.

SAMUEL JAMES (*slyly*). Yes. He sold it for thirty pounds and William John McKillop looking all roads to give him forty for it.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN (*angrily, and stamping his foot*). Will you hould your tongue, you blathering idiot. Bad scran to ye for a meddle— (*He goes forward to go into room and aims a box on the ears at*

SAMUEL JAMES, *who retreats to table and watches him go through door followed by* MRS. GRANAHAN. *A noise of voices in angry argument is heard.*)

SAMUEL JAMES. Now he'll catch it. If I had been da I would have kept back five pound and tould her I sold it for twenty-five, but the ould man's that honest he knows no better. (ROBBIE JOHN *enters. He crosses over and seats himself near the table.*) Well, Robbie, and what d'ye think of his great object lesson till ye. It was me put it intil da's head. I thought there might be a bit of value.

ELLEN. There, I just thought it was you did it. You're a schemer, that's what you are.

GRANDFATHER. Aye. There's a dale of the crook in ye Samuel James. You're deeper nor one would think.

SAMUEL JAMES (*suddenly to* ROBBIE JOHN). I seen Jenny Graeme at the market to-day, Robbie. (*A pause.*) Oh, well maybe you're no interested in her. (*To* ELLEN.) Man, there was a fine lock of cattle at the fair, Ellen.

ELLEN. I'm sure there was. Who was with Jenny Graeme. (*She nudges* SAMUEL JAMES *slyly.*) Who left her home?

SAMUEL JAMES (*slyly at* ELLEN, *winking*). Young M'Donnell of the Hill Head was looking after her pretty close.

ELLEN (*glancing at* ROBBIE *and then at* SAMUEL JAMES, *and smiling*). He's a very nice young man.

ROBBIE JOHN (*savagely.*) I wish her luck with yon booby.

SAMUEL JAMES. There's nothing the matter with him. He has a nice place and a fine farm forbye.

ROBBIE JOHN. Farms and cattle and crops don't make a fine man.

GRANDFATHER. Deed, now, Robbie, they goes a long ways.

SAMUEL JAMES. Better nor bows and fiddles and such trash. (*To* ROBBIE JOHN.) I heerd up at Bann to-day

that ye won three pounds at the Feis at Newcastle a Monday.

ELLEN. I knew that on Tuesday. It was fine of Robbie, wasn't it ?

SAMUEL JAMES. It all depends. Da heerd it for the first time to-day, and I can tell you it didn't seem fine to him. Coorse a pound or two would ha'e made a differ of opinion same as it done with you, I expect.

ELLEN. You needn't sneer at me. It was me told Robbie to keep it. He was going to give it all up. I wouldn't be so mean as to take it off him.

SAMUEL JAMES. Oh, you're an unusual sort of young woman, I know, but if Robbie John takes my advice he better choose quick between playing the fiddle and staying on here. Of course, Robbie, you can plaze yourself. I suppose you could make as much by fiddling as if you stayed on here and waited till we had the place divided among the three of us.

ELLEN. Why I heard from Mr. Taylor that father was worth four or five hundred pounds, and then the two farms besides.

GRANDFATHER. Aye. You'd be a long time, Robbie John, 'arning that wi' your fiddle. Don't heed his fool talk, son. Stay at home and never mind the musicianers.

ELLEN. I'm sure Mr. Graeme would never let his daughter marry a penniless fiddler—even if she would herself. I don't know. She might and she—mightn't.

SAMUEL JAMES (*rising from table and stretching himself.*) Coorse, if he made a name for himself he could marry the landlord's daughter. I heerd the quality go mad after the musicianers. (*Goes out to yard.*)

GRANDFATHER. Robbie. Come here.

ROBBIE JOHN. Aye. What is it ?

GRANDFATHER. Take heed till yourself. I know what's going on better nor you. Take an ould man's advice. Settle yourself down and give up that string instrument. Coorse, I dare say you may go and become a great man

with it, but you are more like to become a cratur like thon that was in as not. There's no good running risks. And your father, I heerd him say himself, if you make your bed you'll lie on it, for he'll never help you out once you take to the fiddling.

ELLEN. Aye, Robbie. Its far better not to run the risk of becoming a beggar man.

ROBBIE JOHN. Well, I'll think over it, Ellen. I'll think over it.

GRANDFATHER. Robbie, come out with me. (*The two go out by door into yard.* WILLIAM JOHN *and* MRS. GRANAHAN *come in arguing excitedly.*)

MRS. GRANAHAN. Well, you can ha'e the pound if you like, but I can tell you it's a sore pinch to make things do. What with the price of the sugar riz up and the flour.

(SAMUEL JAMES *comes in again, apparently having overheard the squabbling, and seats himself expectantly at the table.*)

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. There. That's enough to do about it. (*He goes over to the fireplace and faces* MRS. GRANAHAN.) Twenty-nine pound you'll get and no more. (*Emphatically.*) Mind that.

MRS. GRANAHAN. I'll mind it, right enough, William Granahan. And it's a sore time I have trying to keep in with one hand what you lavish out with the other.

SAMUEL JAMES (*nudging* ELLEN *slyly*). I was talking by the way to Mrs. McCrum, the milliner, mother, to-day, and she said to give you word she'd have your new tay gown ready for you a Tuesday week.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN (*triumphantly*). There you are, ma'am. There you are. Keeping it in wi' one hand, were you ? Faith if I know anything you lather it out with both hands and feet. You want to rob me of me one pound, do ye ? And all for an ould tay gown ? (*Contemptuously.*) A tay gown !

ELLEN (*maliciously*). A tay gown's not expensive.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. Oh, indeed now. Hach. You'll be wanting one next, I suppose. A nice house this is, where a man could'nt get keeping as much as would buy him an ounce of tobaccy. (*Viciously.*) Man, I do hate this hypockerisy.

MRS. GRANAHAN. I'll not talk any more till ye, William Granahan. You're full of drink and bad tongued.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN (*wildly*). If you say any more till me, I'll smash all the crockery in the house.

MRS. GRANAHAN. Come out, Ellen, to the creamery, and maybe when we come in again he'll be a bit cooler in the head. (*She hurries out, followed by* ELLEN, *through door to yard.*)

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN (*to* SAMUEL JAMES). She's a tarr'ble woman, your mother, when she's started. But I'm much obliged to you, Samuel James, for the mention of that tay gown. By me sang but that turned the enemy's flank. (*Laughs.*) I'm danged but you're the boy. (*Gratefully.*) Heth you saved me a pound anyway.

SAMUEL JAMES (*rising and going over sheepishly to him*). You'll not forget me, da ? Will you ?

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN (*suspiciously*). Na.

SAMUEL JAMES. Well, ye might gie us a part of it.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. How much d'ye want ?

SAMUEL JAMES. Twelve shillings.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. Would you take the very boots off my feet. Where would I get ye twelve shillings ?

SAMUEL JAMES. Out of the pound of coorse. Where else ?

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN (*grumblingly*). You're asking ower much. If it was a saxpence (SAMUEL JAMES *shrugs his shoulders*), or a shilling (SAMUEL JAMES *shrugs more emphatically*), or two shillings.

SAMUEL JAMES. No.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. Or half a crown ?

SAMUEL JAMES. No.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. I'd think nothing of

lending them till ye. But twelve shillings. Would three shillings no do ?

SAMUEL JAMES. No. It won't. Either give me the twelve shillings or I'll tell her about your conduct—

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. There. There it is, an bad scran to ye. To think of me walking ten mile to the fair and back and arguing wi' dailers and cheats of all kinds and getting thirty pound for a baste I wouldn't buy myself for thirty shillings, and only getting eight shillings out of it.

SAMUEL JAMES (*whistling and counting the money delightedly*). Aye. It's a hard world and no mistake.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN (*excitedly*). I'll go down to the shough and drown myself, I will.

SAMUEL JAMES. Na. Go to MucAlanan's and drown yerself.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. I'm danged but you're right. Na. Na. She'll hear me going out by the gate.

SAMUEL JAMES. Boys, but you're the poor hearted man. Well, I'm away. (*He makes to door.*)

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. Where now ?

SAMUEL JAMES. To Courdy Williamson's for the loan of a monkey wrinch for the new machine. The hay's for cutting the morrow.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. Oh, aye. An, you'll be for coorting that young imp of a daughter of his, I warrant ye. Were you there yesterday forenoon ?

SAMUEL JAMES (*somewhat taken aback*). Yes. Why d'ye ask ?

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN (*sarcastically*). Oh, nothing. Only I hadn't a sowl to help me wi' them cattle.

SAMUEL JAMES. Well, wasn't Robbie John at home ? What ailed him, he couldn't help ye ?

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. Look you here, Samuel James. I've been worried with that boy this long time. (SAMUEL JAMES *nods approvingly.*) I've made up my mind to-day after seeing yon scarecrow we met at Buckna cross

roads, Robbie John aither mends himself or he goes out of this.

SAMUEL JAMES. You're right, da. You ha'e stood his goings on a long time. I think ye do well to stop him. It's only doing him a kindness.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. I'll just ask him to burn it when he comes in. If he won't he can just plaze himself. I'll ha'e no more to do with him. (*Suddenly.*) I wonder what his mother would say to that ?

SAMUEL JAMES. She's just as tired of it as you are. Wait ; I'll call her in. (*Going to the door and shouting.*) Are you there, ma'am ?

MRS. GRANAHAN (*without*). Aye. (*She comes in and stands looking inquiringly at both of them.*) What bee ha'e you got now in your bonnet ?

SAMUEL JAMES. Da's just been talking about Robbie John, and he wants you to hear what he says.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. Robbie John's an idle useless bauchle. He'll aither mend himself or go out of this.

MRS. GRANAHAN (*sharply*). Mend yourself first, me good man.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. It's not like as if he took a drop o' drink or fell in with bad company, for you'll get quet of drink and bad company if you ha'e no money.

SAMUEL JAMES (*slyly*). It was mother and I larnt you that.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN (*snappishly*). Will you hould your tongue. (*To* MRS. GRANAHAN.) When he might ha' been looking after the cattle or the pigs or something else, where is he ? Up in the loft playing that damnation fiddle of his. Night and morning he's at it.

MRS. GRANAHAN. Deed and he's doin' badly by it, and no mistake. He's not been worth a ha'penny till us, this last six months. I think you do right just to stop him.

SAMUEL JAMES. I heerd he won three pound at the Feis last Monday at Newcastle.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. There you are. And

he never offered me one ha'penny of it. Me that brought him up and reared and fed him. Them that plays the fiddle comes to no good end, I can tell ye. (*Reminiscently and with a sort of shame-faced pride.*) Not but I wasn't the great man at it myself wanst. And you were the girl that could have danced to it, Mary. But, thank God, I quet it.

SAMUEL JAMES (*curiously*). Why ?

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. I might have took to drink and bad company and the like.

MRS. GRANAHAN. You're no rid of that yet, William Granahan. Ye mind what way ye come home last Bann Fair on top of the bread cart.

SAMUEL JAMES (*slyly*). Aye. And the way the Scarva man done him out of the price of the two pigs.

MRS. GRANAHAN. That's one thing I can't get over. Was it in a public-house ye met him ?

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. There. There. That's enough to do about it. I hear enough about drinking from John Graeme every session day without you eternally at it. Call Robbie John in for me. (SAMUEL JAMES *goes out.*) Now, do you hear what I say, woman. I'll ha'e no more of this casting up about Bann Fair or those pigs. So forever hould your peace about it. For I'm deeved listening to you. (SAMUEL JAMES *re-enters, followed by* ROBBIE JOHN *and the* GRANDFATHER.) Where's that fiddle of yours, Robbie John ? Bring it to me. (ROBBIE JOHN *looks curiously at him and then at* SAMUEL JAMES. *He goes into room and brings it out. He holds it in his hands and looks suspiciously at the father.*) Now, Robbie John, listen to what I and your mother have thought about this. For our sake and your own we want you to give up that accursed thing and put it from you.

ROBBIE JOHN. Why ? What harm does it do you or me ?

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. It makes you negleck your work. It makes you think of things you shouldn't think of. It makes you lose sleep of nights sitting up

and playing, and then you can't rise in the morning. When you should be polishing the harness or mending a ditch, or watching the cattle, or feeding the poultry, you've got this thing in your hand and practising on it.

ROBBIE JOHN (*indignantly*). It's not true. I don't do these things. I—

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. Now will you attend to your duties and give up this playing. What good will it ever do ye ? Ye seen what it brought yon man till that was in here. It's a tarr'ble warning till ye.

ROBBIE JOHN. The fiddle didn't make him what he is. The drink did that.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN (*scornfully*). Aye. The leader of an ould circus band or something like. (*Getting excited.*) I'd just do with that as I'd do with a sarpint. Trample it under my heels.

ROBBIE JOHN (*threateningly*). I'll kill the first man dares to put a hand on it.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN (*angrily*). You dare talk that way to your father !

MRS. GRANAHAN. Now, Robbie, dear. Don't be getting on that way.

GRANDFATHER. Robbie, my son, mind what I was telling you. It's better to bear it if you can, my son. It's a hard thing, but you can take my word for it, you'll no regret it.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN (*sadly*). I had of coorse a will drawn up and signed by 'torney McAllan, and was for laving ye nice and comfortable when I was to be taken away. (*He breaks down.*) Robbie, Robbie, my son, sure it's not my heart you're for breaking.

SAMUEL JAMES. Coorse I heerd from one of the judges, Robbie, at the Feis that you had the touch of a master, and all that sort of thing ; but I advise ye— (*Here the* GRANDFATHER *shakes his stick at him threateningly.*) I advise ye—of coorse it's hard to know.

GRANDFATHER (*looking angrily at* SAMUEL JAMES). Don't think of that, Robbie. Sure every man that

plays a fiddle thinks he's a genius. Don't be led astray, son.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN (*coaxingly*). Aye. Your grand-da has sense with him, Robbie. After all what about it. Man, there's that bonny wee lass waiting for you at Graemes. To the fire with it. (ROBBIE JOHN *hesitates, then, with bowed head, he goes forward to place it on the fire.*)

CURTAIN.

SCENE II.

(*The same scene.* ELLEN *and* MRS. GRANAHAN *seated near fire.*)

ELLEN. So Mr. Graeme is coming over here to settle matters with father to-day, do you say ?

MRS. GRANAHAN. Yes, child, he's coming to-day

ELLEN. What is it all about ?

MRS. GRANAHAN. Well, I suppose he's anxious to see what money is coming to Robbie John. He doesn't want to throw his daughter away without asking questions. I expect she's well enough to do to marry anyone she likes, but he's a canny man.

ELLEN. Well, I suppose he's right. He must be anxious to see her well married.

MRS. GRANAHAN. Oh, now between the two of them, Robbie John will be a sight better off nor your father and I, Ellen, when we married.

ELLEN. Robbie's a lucky man too. I never seen anyone as fond of him as she is. I wonder when father will be going to see anyone about me ?

MRS. GRANAHAN (*rising and going to look out of the window*). Whist, child, you're time enough. (*After a look*). Aye. I thought we might see him soon. Tell me now (*resuming her seat*), Who was it left ye home from John Graeme's temperance lecture ?

ELLEN. Why ?

MRS. GRANAHAN (*knowingly*). He's a brave body anyway.

ELLEN Who ?

MRS. GRANAHAN. Now you're the soft lassie. Who's the manager of the creamery up beyont ?

ELLEN (*unsuspectingly*). Tom Taylor, of course.

Mrs. Granahan. And, of coorse, it was Tom Taylor left ye home, and is coming in here this minute. (*Knock at the door.*) Come in. Come in. (*Taylor enters.*) Why, speak of the divil—how d'ye do, Mr. Taylor.

Taylor (*he comes in, stands rather awkwardly looking at* Ellen, *and then goes over near them*). Very well, thank you, ma'am.

Mrs. Granahan. This is my daughter Ellen. (*Slyly.*) I think ye met her afore.

Taylor (*shaking hands with* Ellen, *he detains her hand for a second and then drops it*). We did, I think, didn't we?

Mrs. Granahan (*knowingly*). I just thought as much. (*Aside.*) Oh, well, he's a brave body, and would do rightly if the creamery does the same. (*Suddenly to Taylor.*) Are ye courting any this weather, Mr. Taylor?

Taylor (*taken aback, then decides to laugh it off*). Well—eh—no. I'm not doing much that way.

Mrs. Granahan (*incredulously*). Oh, indeed. Well I heerd otherwise. It's full time ye were looking about for a wife. You'll be getting well on past thirty soon.

Taylor (*fidgeting uneasily*). Oh I'm time enough for a couple of years or more. I want to look round me a bit.

Mrs. Granahan. Well, ye better look sharp, for you'll soon be getting too ould for getting any sort of a decent girl. (*Inquisitively.*) Have ye anyone in your eye yet?

Taylor. I have an account to pay your good man, Mrs. Granahan.

Mrs. Granahan. Two pound ten is due. (*Thinking.*) Aye. But I suppose you'll be now in what I would call a good way of doing?

Taylor. There was a five per cent. dividend this half year. The creamery is going on well. (*Searching in pocket and getting out account.*) Two pounds nine and six, ma'am, begging your pardon.

Mrs. Granahan. Ach sure sixpence is neither here

nor there to a creamery. (*Pauses.*) If that's the way you are, you could be married in a year's time and—

TAYLOR (*evidently desirous to lead conversation off this topic.*) Here's the money, ma'am. (*He lays it down on the table and counts it out.*) You'll do as well as Mr. Granahan, I suppose. You take all to do with the money part, I think.

MRS. GRANAHAN. Yes, I do. You were at the lecture last Monday ?

TAYLOR (*alarmed*). What the devil— (*Suddenly to* MRS. GRANAHAN, *and genially.*) Yes. Could you oblige me with a receipt, ma'am ?

MRS. GRANAHAN. Surely. Here, Ellen, get me the pen and ink. (ELLEN *goes into room.*) I suppose now there were some nice young weemen there—eh, Mr. Taylor ?

TAYLOR (*uneasily*). Yes. And don't forget the stamp, ma'am.

MRS. GRANAHAN. Ach, sure a penny stamp's what you always carry with ye. (*Confidently.*) I think shame on ye, Mr. Taylor, trifling wih the poor girls. There's no excuse for a man of your age.

TAYLOR (*fidgeting*). Well, well, I— Here's a stamp ma'am. (*Impatiently.*) I'm young enough yet. I don't want to marry yet awhile.

MRS. GRANAHAN. Well now, I think ye'd be better of some one to look after ye. There's William John Granahan. He's never done being thankful since he married. He says he doesn't know what he mightn't have been if he hadn't married me.

TAYLOR (*slyly*). I can quite believe that.

MRS. GRANAHAN. It was a good job for him, I can tell ye. For what with going to dances and the like and public-houses, he was for making a nice mess of himself. (*Confidentially*). And between you and me, Ellen will no be so badly off aither when he goes. (ELLEN *comes in and puts paper, etc., on table.*)

TAYLOR. Here's the stamp, ma'am.

MRS. GRANAHAN (*not noticing*). And there's a girl for

you, Mr. Taylor, that we spent a deal of time over, and was brought up most careful. She's none of your or'nary girls.

ELLEN (*sharply*). Mother! (*She looks at* TAYLOR, *smiles, and shrugs her shoulders.*)

MRS. GRANAHAN (*motioning silence.*) There's too many girls running about and all they can do is—sing a song or two, and dress themselves up like play actresses, and run about at bazaars and the like trying to get ahoult of voung men.

TAYLOR. You're quite right, ma'am.

MRS. GRANAHAN. Now, there's Ellen was four years at a boardng school that Mr. Graeme recommended till us, and I can tell you she got the proper schooling, and let alone that, she can bake, sew or knit, and knows all about the managing of a house.

ELLEN. Oh quit! (*She looks diffidently across at* TAYLOR, *who grins*).

MRS. GRANAHAN (*counting money.*) Here. It's sixpence short of the count.

TAYLOR. Let me see. (*He goes to table and counts money.*) Two and two's four, and two's six, and two and six is eight and six, and one shilling—nine and six.

MRS. GRANAHAN (*thinking*). Nine and six. I thought it was—oh, yes, it was nine and six.

TAYLOR. Yes. Nine and six.

MRS. GRANAHAN. Very good. I'll write you a receipt. (*Takes pen and paper.*)

ELLEN (*to* TAYLOR, *who stands looking over at her.*) You haven't been round this way a long time, Mr. Taylor. What ailed you, you didn't call?

TAYLOR. Oh, I was very busy. (*He looks at* MRS. GRANAHAN, *who is writing laboriously. Then goes and examines a fiddle that hangs on the wall*). Why! I thought Robbie John had burnt his fiddle and promised to play no more!

MRS. GRANAHAN. Aye, so he did, but there's a strange story with that thing you're looking at. There was a

tramp come here one day I was out, and when I come back I found him playing away on that thing, and the house in an uproar.

TAYLOR. Aye ? He left it here then ?

MRS. GRANAHAN. No, wait till I tell ye. I packed him out of this, and the next thing I heerd about him was when a wheen of weeks ago he was got half dead with wet and cold in the Flough Moss. John McKillop was down for cutting turf and found him in a peat hole with his hands on the brew, and the ould fiddle beside him.

ELLEN. Yes. The poor soul died the next day, and just before he died he asked McKillop to bring over his fiddle to give to Robbie John. Robbie had been kind to him some time or other, and the poor being never forgot it.

TAYLOR. Ach, aye. I do remember hearing something about it. They said he had been a big man in his day I think.

MRS. GRANAHAN. Aye. He was blathering the day he was here about being the leader of an ould band or something like, now that I call to mind. But, indeed, I paid no heed till him, for he was part drunk.

TAYLOR (*curiously*). You didn't get Robbie to burn this one, I see.

MRS. GRANAHAN. Well, you see, Samuel James said it was a very valuable one, and worth fifty pounds or more maybe. There's an inscription on it somewhere if you look.

TAYLOR (*taking down fiddle and examining it*). Aye, so I see. "To Nicholas Werner, as a token of esteem from his orchestra. Vienna, 1878."

ELLEN. Yes, poor soul. He was telling the truth, and no one believing.

TAYLOR. And does Robbie never play it ?

ELLEN. Not since he promised that I know of. But all the same it must tempt him, for I see his eyes fixed on it often enough when he thinks no one's looking.

TAYLOR (*he looks over at* MRS. GRANAHAN, *who appears*

to be engrossed in her writing. He is just slipping his arm round ELLEN *when* MRS. GRANAHAM *looks up. He instantly drops his arm.*)

MRS. GRANAHAN. Have you that stamp, Mr. Taylor ?

TAYLOR. It's usual, Mrs. Granahan, for whoever signs the receipt to supply the stamp ; however, there you are. (MRS. GRANAHAN *licks the stamp and signs the receipt.*) The writing doesn't come easy to you, ma'am.

MRS. GRANAHAN. Now, it's not very courteous making fun of poor ould weemen, Mr. Taylor. I thought better of you nor that.

TAYLOR. Ould weemen ? Talk sense, Mrs. Granahan. I only wish my old woman, if ever I have one, looks as well as you do.

MRS. GRANAHAN. There, there, none of your fool nonsense. You don't go blarneying me, like you do the likes of Ellen there.

ELLEN. Ach, mother !

MRS. GRANAHAN. I'm much oblidged to ye for the money, Mr. Taylor. I must put it by me. (*Goes into room.*)

ELLEN. I suppose you've heard about Robbie ?

TAYLOR (*coming near her*). No. What happened ?

ELLEN. He's to be married to Jane Graeme at Christmas, and Mr. Graeme's coming over here to-day to settle about the money.

TAYLOR (*slyly*). I wonder whom your father will be settling matters with, Ellen, when you get engaged ?

ELLEN. Why, of course—whoever gets me, I suppose.

TAYLOR. Well there's one thing I wouldn't haggle with him over.

ELLEN. And what would that be ?

TAYLOR. Yourself, of course. (*He draws her to him and makes to kiss her.* ROBBIE JOHN *and* SAMUEL JAMES *pass by the window and* ELLEN *immediately slips away from him. When they come in she lifts a can and goes out by door to yard.* ROBBIE JOHN *and* SAMUEL JAMES *seat themselves at the table. Leaning against table and nodding to both.*) Well, how's the corn doing ?

SAMUEL JAMES. Oh, fairly well the year. How's the cream market?

TAYLOR. Much the same. Nothing new with you, I suppose?

SAMUEL JAMES. Well, they're going to settle ROBBIE the day, that's all. He's a lucky boy.

TAYLOR. I wish you joy, Robbie.

ROBBIE JOHN. Thank ye. Thank ye kindly. She's a nice wee girl.

SAMUEL JAMES. You don't seem as gay hearted as I would expect, does he, Mr. Taylor? You'd think he was for getting hung or something. I suppose ye heard all about him giving up the fiddle playing? And the luck of it. To burn his old fiddle, and then get another a few days after. You'd think there was some sort of a strange warning or advice or something in it.

TAYLOR. It is very strange.

ROBBIE JOHN. Samuel James, do ye remember the time that ould tramp was playing on this fiddle as he went out that day down the loney? (SAMUEL JAMES *nods.*) Well, it seemed to me as if he were playing to bring me out after him. D'ye mind the story, Mr. Taylor, about the piper that went off with all the children, and was never heard tell of again.

TAYLOR. Aye.

ROBBIE JOHN. Well, I could feel him drawing me out after him the very same way. And last night, as sure as death, I heard the same uncanny air singing in my ears, and it seemed to be calling me to come out of this.

TAYLOR (*exchanges startled looks with* SAMUEL JAMES.) Och, I suppose the wind or something outside. But there's no doubt, Robbie, you have a genius for the fiddle. There was a German professor of music at Newcastle the day you won the prize and he was— But it's not right of me to make you vexed, now you've stopped playing.

SAMUEL JAMES. Ach, he doesn't mind you telling. Do ye, Robbie? Tell and hearten him up a wee bit.

TAYLOR. This German was so struck with your playing that he was looking for you all roads, but you were nowhere to be found.

ROBBIE JOHN (*interested*). Aye ? I went straight home. I wonder what he wanted ?

SAMUEL JAMES. Perhaps he could have given him a lift, eh, Mr. Taylor ?

TAYLOR. He was talking to me afterwards, and, by the way, I had clean forgot. (*Fumbling in his pocket.*) He gave me his card to give you. I have it on me somewhere I think. (*Producing it.*) Aye, there it is. (*Reading.*) Professor —— something or other, Royal College of Music.

ROBBIE JOHN. Keep it. If I had it, it would only tempt me.

TAYLOR (*looking significantly at* SAMUEL JAMES, *who indicates by shaking his head that he considers* ROBBIE JOHN *hopeless.*) You're a queer character. All right. But you can have it any time. (*To* SAMUEL JAMES.) I wish I had said nothing about it. Where's the old man ?

SAMUEL JAMES. The two old men are out in the haggard, but (*slyly*) Ellen's in the cream-house. (TAYLOR *goes out through door at back.* SAMUEL JAMES *looks over at* ROBBIE JOHN, *who sits in deep thought near the fire.*) You can no hoodwink me, Robbie. You're no happy.

ROBBIE JOHN. I'm happy enough. (*Angrily.*) Don't be tormenting me.

SAMUEL JAMES. Faith you look happy. (*Drawing closer.*) I seen you last night at it.

ROBBIE JOHN (*looks round startled.*) I couldn't keep from it. There's a spell or something on it.

SAMUEL JAMES. Na. Na. But every fiddle has its spell for you. You broke your promise.

ROBBIE JOHN. You followed me then ?

SAMUEL JAMES. Yes. Ye crept on your stocking soles to the back of the forth ditch, and played there for two mortal hours, till I was heart feared they'd miss us out of bed, and raise a cry.

ROBBIE JOHN. And you stood two hours in the night listening to me.

SAMUEL JAMES. I 'clare to God there's something out of common with you or that fiddle, for I had to stop and listen, and me teeth chattering with could.

ROBBIE JOHN. I did wrong, I know, but look here, Samuel James, as long as I see that thing hanging there, my hands are itching to hold it, and the tunes I could play—they keep running in my head. (*Suddenly rising.*) I'll destroy it.

SAMUEL JAMES (*quieting him down*). Na. Na. It's a valuable fiddle.

ROBBIE JOHN. It is. Ach, man, but it does tempt me sorely.

SAMUEL JAMES. Aye. You might make a fortune, the dear knows. Man, I know what I would do if I could play like you. (*Sarcastically.*) That was if ye had the heart.

ROBBIE JOHN. (*excited*). Ach quit! Quit talking to me that way. (*Goes out by door at back.*)

SAMUEL JAMES (*getting off seat and standing about centre of room*). He'll take to it yet. (*He goes over nearer fireplace.*) I can see it working in him. Sure his hands are trembling and his fingers twitching all the times he's looking at it. (*The* GRANDFATHER *enters softly by door at back. He stands looking at* SAMUEL JAMES, *who does not observe him.*) Maybe it's no right of me to let it hang there. Ach. He maybe could make money plenty. I want till have a fine place and a lock of money. And I'll build a bigger house.

GRANDFATHER (*hobbling over to his seat*). Aye. Aye. Ye could do a heap with money, Samuel James.

SAMUEL JAMES (*alarmed, but endeavouring to bluff with a show of genialty*). Money's the thing, grand-da.

GRANDFATHER. Its a tarr'ble fine thing, there's no doubt. Food and drink and fine clothes and fine houses ye can get.

SAMUEL JAMES. And tobaccy and cigars, and the front seat at a consart.

GRANDFATHER. Here. Don't be tempting Robbie John about playing on that fiddle. You've upset the boy.

SAMUEL JAMES (*sharply*). I don't tempt him.

GRANDFATHER. You're always reminding him of it. I can see what you're working for Samuel James. Ye want all the money for yourself.

SAMUEL JAMES. Have sense, grand-da. Sure they're settling the matter to-day, and he's to be married at Christmas. He wouldn't do anything rash now.

GRANDFATHER. The clock has no struck the hour yet, Samuel James. Ye could no tell what's working in his mind.

SAMUEL JAMES. Well, he'd be a fool, and what's more, he knows himself to be one if he goes. He'll lose all the money from da if he goes, and I'm sure Jennie Graeme's father wouldn't turn his head to look at a fiddler.

GRANDFATHER. Aye. He's tarr'ble proud of his family.

MRS. GRANAHAN (*opens door of room and comes in*). Here. I seen Mr. Graeme and your da coming up the loney from the window in the low room.

SAMUEL JAMES. Well, they'll be for coming in here and we're only in the road. Come and twist a wheen of ropes for me. (SAMUEL JAMES *and* GRANDFATHER *go out by door at back.*)

MRS. GRANAHAN (*takes brush and sweeps floor. She then arranges a kettle at the fire. Then goes to door and looks out.*) Aye. Here he bees now and that good man of mine talking till him a dozen till one. And ten till one, he'll have John Graeme that angered with his arguing that there'll be nothing settled the day. (*Sound* of WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN'S *voice. He appears to be talking at a great rate, and most emphatically.* JOHN GRAEME *and* WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN *pass the window.*) Aye, to be sure. He'd rather get the better of Graeme in an argyment as settle with him over twenty sons, the ould gomeril. (JOHN GRAEME *and* WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN *enter.*) How dy'e do, Mr. Graeme? (*She shakes hands with him warmly and warns the husband*

by nods not to resume the argument.) It's the brave weather for the crops this.

JOHN GRAEME. Indeed we should be deeply thankful for the mercies vouchsafed us. (*Solemnly.*) Aye indeed.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. Well, indeed, I would be that myself, only the half of them young chickens going off with the gapes. It was a tarr'ble to do to save what's left of them.

MRS. GRANAHAN. Oh, well. It's all in the way of Providence, Mr. Graeme. (*She looks disapprovingly across at* GRANAHAN. *The two men seat themselves.* JOHN GRAEME *beside table and* WILLIAM GRANAHAN *on edge of table next him.*) That was a fine lecture on the temperance ye gied us, Mr. Graeme, at Ballykelly. It done some people a heap of good. (*She looks across meaningly at* WILLIAM GRANAHAN.)

JOHN GRAEME (*apparently much pleased*). Do you say so, Mrs. Granahan? I'm much pleased indeed to hear of it.

MRS. GRANAHAN. I only wish more of the same kind had heerd you. (*She looks across again at* WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN, *who avoids her eye.*) But you'll excuse me, I'm sure. I have some things next room to look after for the evening. (*She curtsies to* GRAEME, *and with a warning look at* GRANAHAN, *goes into room.*)

JOHN GRAEME. I am very much pleased indeed to hear your good woman say she liked what I said. How did ye take to it yourself, Mr. GRANAHAN?

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN (*suddenly waking up from twisting and untwisting a piece of string which he has found, and in which he appears deeply interested while his wife is talking.*) How did we like the speech you gave on temperance, d'ye say? (*Carelessly.*) Och, it was a very good and sensible discoorse, so I heerd Ellen and Mrs. Granahan say.

JOHN GRAEME. Ye didn't go yourself then? (*Disappointedly.*) Man, I wanted ye there particular.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. I have no doot if I had been

there I could have got up and contradicted ye, for (*emphatically*), I did not agree with all I heerd ye said.

JOHN GRAEME (*surprised*). Not agree with what I said. (*Scornfully, with evident disgust.*) Man, ye couldn't argy with facts. What did ye disagree with in the discoorse ?

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. Well, for one thing, ye said there was too many public houses in the country.

JOHN GRAEME (*scornfully*). And every right-minded man would agree with that.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. Well, I can shew you another. You'll no argy with me that if a man wants to drink he will drink.

JOHN GRAEME (*somewhat perplexed*). Well—— (*slowly*) I suppose I do agree till that.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. And if a man will drink he's bound till get drunk.

JOHN GRAEME. Na. Na. I don't agree till that.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN (*triumphantly*). Did you ever hear tell of a man who was drunk without drinking ?

JOHN GRAEME. That's not in the argyment at all.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. But I tell you it is. A man's bound to be drinking if he gets drunk.

JOHN GRAEME. I'm no contradicting that at all. I——

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN (*interrupting*). Now, hould your tongue till I explain till ye. If a man gets drunk when he's drinking, he's bound to be drunk of coorse.

JOHN GRAEME (*contemptuously*). Ye talk like a child.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. Now wait till I get it hammered intil ye Now when that man's drunk he's bound to have been drinking. (*He hesitates and is obviously confused. Then suddenly seems to grasp the idea he wants.*) Aye—in a public house of coorse.

JOHN GRAEME. O' coorse. What else would he do there but drink.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. Now that man gets drunk. (*He looks enquiringly at* GRAEME.)

JOHN GRAEME (*hopelessly*). Aye.

William John Granahan. Now the public houses are that scarce that he has till walk home maybe ten mile or more.

John Graeme. Well ?

William John Granahan. And ten till wan he gets lost or something, and they have the whole countryside upset looking for him. Now, if he had a public house convanient in his own townland, there would be no bother at all, and he could be at his work the next morning without any interrupting of labour. D'ye see what I mean ?

Mrs. Granahan (*suddenly appearing at door evidently angry.*) The more public houses the less drinking did he say ? If he had *his* way of it every other house from here to Buckna would be a public house. (*To husband.*) Quit your wasting Mr. Graeme's time with your argyments, and settle what he has come here to do with ye.

William John Granahan. Well. Well. We'll agree till let the matter drop. You have nobody but your daughter, I suppose ?

John Graeme. Well, I have a sister married up in Dublin.

William John Granahan. But she's in a good way of doing, I suppose ?

John Graeme. Oh yes. Purty fair. Of coorse I would like to leave her something.

William John Granahan. Ach, give her a lock of your hair or something. You'll lave the place to your daughter of coorse.

John Graeme. Yes. I'll be doing that.

William John Granahan. Aye. It's a purty fair farm of land. Ye bought it out of coorse ?

John Graeme. Two year come March, and a good reduction.

William John Granahan. Aye. So I heerd. Well if ye give her the farm and what money you have I'll give Robbie a cheque for a hunnert pound.

John Graeme (*impressively*). William John Granahan,

d'ye think this is a horse fair? My daughter will have no man unner five hunnert pound.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN (*uneasily and walking about*). Man, you'll never get her married, John Graeme, at that way of talking. Five hunnert pound! D'ye think I'm a Rockyfellow? Have some sense about ye.

JOHN GRAEME. Aither that or no son of yours weds my daughter. Five hunnert pound and not one ha'penny less. There's the family name to be thought of.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. Ach! Family name! A lock of ould wives' blathers about who was married till who, till you'd have your head sore taking it all in.

JOHN GRAEME. You've heerd what I have to say. Take it or leave it. You can plaze yourself.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. Five hunnert pound. It's a tarr'ble price. Would two hunnert no do? You see I have Samuel James and Ellen to provide for.

JOHN GRAEME. A Graeme of Killainey weds no man unner five hunnert pound, William Granahan. Mind that. I want my daughter married to no beggarman.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN (*excitedly*). Beggarman! Beggarman, did ye say? Hats, John Graeme, I think ye should be proud of one of yours marrying a Granahan. Money or no money, that's a nice way of talking.

JOHN GRAEME. I suppose ye know I come of good family, Mr. Granahan?

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN (*sarcastically*). I heard ye were once cotter folk up by Dromara mountain.

JOHN GRAEME (*proudly*). My father and my forefathers had my farm—aye, from the time of the planting.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. D'ye tell me? I nivir seen your lease of the farm, but if coorse if ye say so. Did ye never hear tell of Smith, Hunter, and Fargison?

JOHN GRAEME (*contemptuously*). John Smith, of Ballykelly?

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN (*disgusted*). Yon cratur? Ballykelly? (*Proudly.*) Lonnon! Well, my mother was

a daughter of Samuel James Smith, and a niece of Robert John Francis Fargison.

JOHN GRAEME (*contemptuously*). I never heerd tell of them.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. I wonner at your ignorance, John Graeme. A well educated man like yourself as set yourself up to be teaching the congregation on matters of law and the temperance question (*raising voice*), and you that ignorant of common information.

MRS. GRANAHAN (*opening door and coming in a few steps*). William John Granahan, didn't I tell ye not to be raising argyments. How you manage at the markets I never could understand. Get your business done, and have settled with it.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN (*soothingly*). Whist, whist woman, I was only discoorsing. Mind the tay and I'll mind the rest. There. There. I agree to your tarms, John Graeme. I'll do it, though it's leaving me tarr'ble short.

JOHN GRAEME (*impressively*). But there's one thing I'll no have, William Granahan.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN (*alarmed*). And what might that be ?

JOHN GRAEME. If your son is to marry my daughter, I'll have none of his music. It's all very well for quality and the like to go strumming on instruments, but it's not meant for a sensible farmer.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. Aye. I agree with that. But look here. Mind ye a song or two and a bit of a tune on a long winter's night keeps one from thinking long, and between you and me, it keeps you from the bottle.

JOHN GRAEME. That's where you and I differs. Supposing he starts playing a dance tune or two, and the neighbours gather in. You like to do the thing decent, and ye send out for drink, and then it goes from bad to worse. Na. Na. I'll have none of that.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. Well. Well. Make your

mind easy. Ye know he has promised me never to play again, and I don't think you'll hear much of his fiddling.

JOHN GRAEME. I'm right glad to hear it, and I'll take your word for it.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. Very good. (*With admiration.*) Man, you'd have made a great horsedealer, John Graeme.

JOHN GRAEME. Aye. I had an uncle in the town, a dealer, and he was always saying that.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. And well you could have done it, if I knowed anything. I'll go to Banbridge a Friday with you to settle with the lawyers.

JOHN GRAEME. Very good. I'll call for you with the trap that day. It's time I was for going home.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. We were expecting ye over the day, and I think Mrs. Granahan has the tea laid in the low room. (*Calls.*) Mrs. Granahan!

MRS. GRANAHAN (*from room*). Yes. (*She comes in and stands waiting near door.*)

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. We're just after settling up about Robbie John and Jennie. Can ye get us a drop of tea?

MRS. GRANAHAN. If you could just take Mr. Graeme for a turn round I could have it for you in wan second. The table's laid and the kettle's boiling. Is your daughter with you, Mr. Graeme?

JOHN GRAEME. Aye. She was coming over after me. I suppose she should be here by now.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. Well, I can show you the new reaper and binder I got. That new Wexford machine, I was telling you about a Sunday in the Session.

JOHN GRAEME. Very good. I'll just go out and see it.

(WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN *and* JOHN GRAEME *go out by door at back.*

MRS. GRANAHAN (*going over to fire and arranging kettle*). Five hunnert pound, and after me telling him to keep till four hunnert. Wait till I get aboult of him again. I'll speak till him. Did he not hear me thump-

ing four times on the door till remind him. He must have a soft spot in his heart for Robbie John. (*Tap at door.*) Come in. (JANE GRAEME *enters somewhat diffidently.*) Oh, it's you, Miss Graeme. (*Shakes hands.*) You're welcome, indeed. Your father's just gone out with my good man.

JANE. Yes. I know—but I thought perhaps—well that Robbie was in here.

MRS. GRANAHAN (*inspecting her critically.*) Deed, now, I couldn't tell you where he might be.

JANE. I'll just sit down a minute. I suppose you are all doing well here, Mrs. Granahan?

MRS. GRANAHAN. Ach, aye. As well as one could expect. There's nothing to make much complaint of.

JANE. I haven't seen Robbie about for some time, Mrs. Granahan. I suppose he's working hard at the harvest.

MRS. GRANAHAN. Aye 'deed, there's a brave press of work on now, what with the corn a cutting, and the rest of it, he's been gey busy of late.

JANE. Indeed I am sure he was. (*She looks round, sees the fiddle hanging up where* TAYLOR *has left it. Aside.*) Is that the fiddle he was telling me about, I wonder? (*To* MRS. GRANAHAN.) Is that the tramp's fiddle, Mrs. Granahan?

MRS. GRANAHAN. Aye, that's the poor cratur's belongings. But you needn't be afeared. Robbie's indeed been very good. He's never played on it to my knowing, and keeps his promise well.

JANE. Poor Robbie. Do you not think he's unhappy about something or other, Mrs. Granahan? He's got very dull and moody this last while.

MRS. GRANAHAN. Deed, now, I don't see much odds in him, Miss Graeme. He never was a great boy with his tongue anyway (*slyly*), bar maybe an odd one or two he would make up to.

JANE. I think you do wrong to keep that fiddle hanging up before his eyes when he has promised never to play again.

MRS. GRANAHAN. Och, blatherations. I never heard the like of the sort of talk people goes on with nowadays. Do ye think my son bees only an ould ba crying for a toy? Deed now I don't think he worries hisself much about it.

JANE (*aside*). Poor Robbie. (*To* MRS. GRANAHAN.) Robbie's a poor hand at the farming, Mrs. Granahan.

MRS. GRANAHAN (*snappishly*). Och aye. But he's greatly mended since he gave up playing.

JANE. Yes. He's a very poor farmer. But he was a wonder with his fiddle.

MRS. GRANAHAN. Oh, well. It cannot be helped. He's better without.

JANE. I don't know. (*She goes over and takes down the fiddle, seats herself, and draws the bow across it as it lies on her lap.*) Robbie could have made it speak to you. He used to make me cry, and then laugh after it. (*She places the strings near her ear and thumbs it wrapt in thought.*)

MRS. GRANAHAN (*looking contemptuously at her and then rising*). You just stay here a second till I fix the tay. (*She goes into room.* JANE *remains seated where she is, occasionally touching the strings and seemingly deep in thought.* ROBBIE JOHN *passes window. He looks in and then goes quickly to door and enters.*)

ROBBIE JOHN. Who's that fiddling? (*Goes over to* JANE.) Why, it's you. I heard you had come.

JANE. Yes. I'm just in a minute or two. (*He sits down beside her.*) Robbie.

ROBBIE JOHN. Well?

JANE. Answer me one question. Aren't you a very poor farmer?

ROBBIE JOHN. Well—I—I suppose I am.

JANE. I knew you were. You're no good for selling cattle or going to market, or looking after crops.

ROBBIE JOHN. You're very hard on me, Jane, to-night. What's put all that into your wee head?

JANE. I've been listening to this and its been telling stories on you.

ROBBIE JOHN. Aye and when its hanging there dumb

it's speaking to me, calling to me. Don't think I'm mad, Jane, but I can't stand it much longer. What makes them hang it there to tempt me? Why? Just because they think they can make a few miserable pounds they'll keep it there making me a liar, a pledge breaker, a man who can't keep his promise. I'll end it now. I'll smash it. (*He makes to take the fiddle out of her hands.*)

JANE (*resisting*). No. No. I want to say—I want to ask something, Robbie. What does it say to you?

ROBBIE JOHN. What does it—ach—I wonder would you laugh at me like the rest if I told you?

JANE (*sitting closer and putting her arm about his neck*). What does it say? Tell me. I would never laugh at you, Robbie.

ROBBIE JOHN (*hesitatingly*). Ach—about—about taking it and making a name for myself with it. (*Bitterly.*) It sounds like fools talk, doesn't it.

JANE. To my father and yours it would sound like that, and Samuel James would laugh at you, but he'd encourage you to believe in it.

ROBBIE JOHN. Let me break it then. Smash it.

JANE (*determinedly*). No. Look, Robbie, if I said it was whispering you the truth, what would you say?

ROBBIE JOHN (*surprised*). But you never would.

JANE (*determinedly*). I say it is the truth.

ROBBIE JOHN. You don't know what you are saying. If I did take to it again look what would happen. My father would turn me out, and your father would forbid me then ever looking at you again. Jane Graeme engaged to a penniless fiddler, and she the best match in the whole countryside. I need never think of you again, Jane.

JANE. I don't care what they did. If you took to that fiddle and went away, would you forget me soon?

ROBBIE JOHN. Forget you, Jane? What makes you think that? Sure you know I gave it up sooner than lose you.

JANE. Then take that fiddle and do what your heart tells you to. I wondered often and often what it was

that made you so sad, and I know now. God made you a musician and not a farmer.

ROBBIE JOHN. And you? What would you do?

JANE. I know and trust some day, God willing, you'll come back to me, rich and famous enough to have them all at your feet. I know you will.

ROBBIE JOHN. God bless you, wee girl, for you've put a heart into me. (*They embrace.* MRS. GRANAHAN *comes in.*)

MRS. GRANAHAN. There. There. Bide a wee. Here they're all coming in for their tea.

(WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN, GRAEME, TAYLOR, SAMUEL JAMES, *and* GRANDFATHER *come in.* ROBBIE JOHN *goes over to fiddle and puts it into a case.*)

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN (*puzzled*). So you're at it again, are you? Well, I suppose there's no harm in giving Miss Graeme a tune, but I thought you were a man to your word.

ROBBIE JOHN (*determinedly*). Look here. I want you all to know I am going to try my luck with this.

SAMUEL JAMES (*exultingly*). You're going to leave us like to make money with it.

ROBBIE JOHN. I'm going to try.

MRS. GRANAHAN. Robbie John, are you daft? What wild nonsense are ye talking about? And you to be married at Christmas, and everything settled about you this very day.

ROBBIE JOHN. I am determined to do it. Nothing can keep me back.

JOHN GRAEME. There. That's enough. My daughter jilted by a Granahan! Come home out of this, Jane Graeme. (*He stamps his foot angrily and beckons her to come.* JANE *moves past* ROBBIE JOHN *where he is standing, and then suddenly kisses him and goes out with her father.*)

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN (*passionately*). You see what you have done, Robert John Granahan. Broken your parents' hearts, and made the name of the Granahans a disgrace to the countryside.

ROBBIE JOHN. My mind's made up. Give me the address of that Professor you told me of, Mr. Taylor.

TAYLOR. You're a fool, Robbie. (*Producing card and handing it to him.*) There. That's it.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. There's time yet, man. After John Graeme and make it up with him. Swear you were only making fun. (*Wildly.*) Quick d—n ye before it's too late.

ROBBIE JOHN. I stick by the fiddle.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN (*mad with anger*). Then stick by the fiddle. And know if ever you are weary or ahungered or in want ye need never look me for any help. (*Shouts.*) Out you go! Out! Don't dare one of you as much as till take his hand. Out! Out the same as the beggar man gone, with the curse of your father on you! (ROBBIE JOHN *goes towards back and stands a moment as if in silent appeal at the open door.* MRS. GRANAHAN *rushes forward to her husband as if to entreat mercy. He angrily puts her away.*) Out! Out you go!

CURTAIN.

EPILOGUE

The same scene, about midnight. There is no light except that of one or two candles and the turf fire. GRANDFATHER *seated at fire.* WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN *leaning despondently on table beside which he is seated.* SAMUEL JAMES *in his favourite seat on the top of the table. Wind, storm and rain outside.*

GRANDFATHER. Aye. Aye. But it's no use talking now. Ye might have been a wee bit the less hasty.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN. And who was going to thole yon conduck. It was too bad of him and after the to-do we had over him this very day. It's a sore heartscald, Robbie John, ye've been to me this day.

SAMUEL JAMES. Ach, sure its over. It's full time we were in our beds. (*Viciously.*) You'd think he was dead and buried to hear the two of you going on. Sure for all knows he may be coming back and a great name with him.

GRANDFATHER. That's you to the ground, ye cunning rascal. Keep him out at all costs. (*Thunder and lightning.*) D'ye hear yon? To think of that poor sowl with his wee bit of a coat out in the could and wet. If any harm come till him, Samuel James, know this, you were the cause of it.

SAMUEL JAMES. It was his own choosing.

GRANDFATHER. His own choosing.? Who flattered him and led him on? Who kept the fiddle hanging there and would let no one take it down, a continuing temptation till him? And you, William John Granahan, with your lust for money. Aye. Lust for money. You couldn't abide him heartening up the house with a tune or two, but ye'd break the boy's heart sending him our

till work again, and him working as much as two of Samuel James there. Ye thought he was wasting time and money. D'ye think there's nothing in this life beyond making money above the rent. I tell you it's not the money alone that makes life worth livin . It's the wee things you think nothing of, but that make your home a joy to come back till, after a hard day's work. And you've sent out into the could and wet the one that was making your home something more than the common. D'ye think them proud city folk will listen to his poor ould ballads with the heart of the boy singing through them. It's only us—its only us, I say, as knows the long wild nights, and the wet and the rain and the mist of nights on the boglands—it's only us I say could listen him in the right way. (*Sobbing*), and ye knowed, right well ye knowed, that every string of his fiddle was keyed to the crying of your own heart.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN (*half sobbing*). There. There. God forgive me, my poor ould boy. I did na know. Whist. Maybe if I say a word or two—Oh God forgive us this night our angry words, and have mercy on my wayward son, O Lord, and keep him safe from harm, and deliver him not unto the adversary. Amen.

GRANDFATHER. Amen. Aye. Aye. Ye done well. Let not the sun go down upon your wrath.

WILLIAM JOHN GRANAHAN (*going to door*). It's a coorse night. (*Pauses.*) I'll leave the door on the hesp. (*He unbolts the door.*)

CURTAIN.

RED TURF

TO

THE RT. HON. W F. BAILEY

P.C., C.B.

CHARACTERS

MARTIN BURKE, *A farmer.*

MARY BURKE, *His wife.*

MICHAEL FLANAGAN (the elder), *A farmer.*

MICHAEL FLANAGAN (the younger), *His son.*

JOHN HEFFERNAN, *An old man.*

The action takes place in the bog lands in the West of Ireland.

TIME .... *The present day*

RED TURF

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

SCENE: *A peasant kitchen in the West country, humbly but comfortably furnished. There is a window and a door at the back, the window looking out on low lying lands that fringe a vast expanse of bog. There is another door leading off to an inner room. To the left is a fireplace at which a fire is burning. Some sods of turf piled in a corner near it. The door to the inner room is slightly ajar, and the sound of a woman singing a child to sleep can be heard. It is bright noon-day, and the sun is shining without. There is a rapping at the door, and* MARY BURKE *opens the room door and comes softly into the kitchen. She is a well-set woman, with a quick, assertive manner, and somewhat hard of feature. She goes to the door at the back and quickly opens it. An old man,* JOHN HEFFERNAN, *is standing without, with a long bundle of rushes under his arm.*

MARY. Why! Good-morrow, John!

JOHN. The blessing of God be on all here.

MARY. And with you too, John. Come in.

JOHN (*hobbling in slowly*). Its the fine day this, thanks be to God.

MARY. Its the fine weather, surely. (*She gives him a curt look, and places a chair for him at the side of the window.*)

JOHN (*placing the bundle he carries on a small table near the window*). And how is the child, Mrs. Burke?

MARY. Sleeping it is now. A fine, strong, little boy, God be thanked.

JOHN (*somewhat shyly*). The bit of a goat I have is run dry, Mary, and I come to ask you if you could as much as give me a drop for to tide me over the morrow. It's queer tasting the tea is without the bit of a white drop in it.

MARY. Surely—surely. (*She goes over to a crock near the dresser.*) Did you bring a vessel with you?

JOHN. No, I did not then. For I was thinking to myself if I bring a big vessel she may not like, and if I bring a small vessel she may not like either, so I leave it to yourself, Mrs. Burke, and musha, may God be good to you as you may be to me.

MARY (*curtly*). There. There. (*She lifts a can down from the dresser and fills it with milk from the crock.*) I wouldn't grudge the ould and the poor like the pensions officers.

JOHN. No, glory be to God, you would not indeed and deed. (*He takes the can from her.*) Where is himself this day?

MARY. Martin is down by the cross roads at Ballinlea.

JOHN (*curiously*). He'll be waiting someone, so?

MARY. He is waiting the agent and an engineer from Athenry this day.

JOHN. The agent. Are they for settling the dispute between you and the Flanagans this day? Well! Well! I heard Father Nolan say it was the map would settle it surely.

MARY. What needs the map for to be settling it? Isn't it mine, and will be always till time is done.

JOHN (*meekly*). Flanagan told me that when his father bought the holding next you, that he was given a promise of turbary on the bog below you, and was showed it on the map at the rent office.

MARY (*with a flash of temper*). If he had a right itself, isn't it strange that he'd be waiting it till my father was dead and buried. And if Martin isn't for standing up to my rights, it's over my own dead body they will be crossing to draw what was never theirs. It's not on my

land with his asses and his carts Mike Flanagan will be coming.

JOHN (*with demure malice*). It's the map will do it surely. Isn't it by the maps all the great lords and ladies be holding of their estates, and be buying and selling of them.

MARY. Martin Burke and myself will be letting no Flanagan be tramping on our lands, John Heffernan.

JOHN (*apparently not heeding her*). It's wonderful the maps is for the truth. The sappers that come here ten years ago were telling me they had come to look an acre of land that was missed from the map of the County of Galway, and it the biggest county of Ireland. And where d'ye think now they found it? In John Haverty's purtas! Ah! The maps is the divil surely. (*Curiously.*) And it was this day they were coming, Mary Burke?

MARY. Himself got a letter two days ago from the agent that he was for setting out Flanagan's turbary this day.

JOHN. Isn't it a great thing now to have hard words and fighting put down, and a little scrapeen of a map to be doing it all? (MARY BURKE *does not answer him, but goes over to the fire and puts on some fresh sods of turf.*) And it's great turf entirely that you have, Mrs. Burke. Black stone turf. It has the great red colour when the fire is on it so. Turf in dispute aye burns red they say.

MARY. Let you not be naming it disputed turf. There is none but ourselves has the right to it.

JOHN. I will not be raising of you, Mrs. Burke. D'ye see this. ((*He shows her the bundle of rushes.*)

MARY. I was wondering what manner of thing you had concealed in it.

JOHN. It's many the bite and the sup it gave me surely, this same, when I was a young, supple fellow, and not feared of drowndings and bog holes.

MARY (*coming closer*). Is it the butt of a gun I see sticking in it?

JOHN. And nothing else is it. (*He proceeds to take off the covering of rushes and reveals an old-fashioned fowling*

piece in good repair.) I was thinking of leaving it with you, Mrs. Burke, for many the bite and sup you gave me.

MARY. I only did what was neighbourly, John.

JOHN. Well, it's getting a done old man I am and near dark, and let alone I with no licence paid this year and the gauger and the sergeant cocking their ears for the sound of it. Keep it for me, Mrs. Burke. It's himself will be getting you an odd hare or two and a moorcock or maybe a brattle at a pheasant in the corn.

MARY. I'll tell himself so. Is it loaded ?

JOHN. It is. But let you not be feared. Put it by you in the corner. I'm feared of the gauger, Mrs. Burke. (*He hobbles over and places the gun against the wall, near the table, then turns and makes for the door.*) Musha and may God bless the kindly heart and the open hand that ye always had for the poor. (*He walks slowly to the door.*)

MARY. God speed you, John. (*He opens the door and passes out, then stops suddenly and peers into the distance.*)

JOHN. Would that be himself yonder with the men ?

MARY. Where ? (*She comes forward quickly and looks out of the door beside him.*)

JOHN. Down by the haggart they are.

MARY (*after a keen scrutiny*). It's himself, surely. They never come this way.

JOHN. It's by Flanagan's boreen they've come across. Aye, they have the spades with them, and are settling it so. Well, I'll bid you the time of day, Mrs. Burke, and please God may you suffer no loss with them down beyont.

MARY. (*watching with eager interest the movements of the group in the distance*). If you pass by them, John, tell Martin not to be long coming.

JOHN. I will so. (*He hobbles away.*)

MARY (*after a pause*). Maybe the gentlemen will be coming this way, and they tired and huugry. I will get a drop for them so. (*She goes over to the dresser and busies herself getting some cups. The sound of voices in the distance can be heard. She stops suddenly and listens.*

The voices come nearer, and it is soon easy to distinguish that one in particular is loud and angry above the rest.) 'Tis himself so. He was a man aye had his temper handy. (*She goes to the door, opens it, and waits expectantly.*)

MARTIN (*from a little distance without, his voice almost a shout*). I defy you to cut a sod of turf on it. (*There is the sound of a big man's sarcastic laugh in answer.*)

MARY (*working herself into a heat of passion*). It is Martin is wronged surely. (*She calls out.*) What are you laughing at himself for, Mike Flanagan?

MIKE FLANAGAN (*without.*) Let you be shutting the door on yourself, Martin Burke, and your wife there, and not be interfering with the law. (MARTIN BURKE *makes no answer, but appears in the doorway. His wife looks at him anxiously and follows him in, closing the door.*)

MARY. Sit down, man. You're all in a fever. What have they been doing on you?

MARTIN (*a small wiry man who shows signs of passion inflamed by drink which he has taken*). Doing on me, is it? (*He flings himself into the chair.*) It's the greatest wrong in the world they have been doing on me. Split my fine stone bank in two and give Flanagan the big half and left me the far end half drownded in water, the ould dirty red turf they left me.

MARY. The far bank to you?

MARTIN. Aye, the far bank, woman. And they give him the one at the end of the land here. The one I was meaning when it was cut for a bit of a bog garden and pasture next the haggart.

MARY (*with a vindictive ring in her voice*). And is it letting that go you be?

MARTIN (*sullenly*). Wasn't it give him this day by the engineer and the agent according to the map. And they had Flanagan with his spade out to come and mark it, for I refused the use of mine to them. And they warned me not to touch a sod of it.

MARY Oh musha! And you'd be letting go the land

that my father and my father's fathers had from time was—that was part of my fortune to you.

MARTIN. It's not my fault the way it is.

MARY (*sarcastically*). And they'll allow you in the rent so ?

MARTIN. Allow in the rent is it ? They told me it was never in the rent. That neither I nor you nor your father ever paid a penny piece for it.

MARY. You can take the case to the county court, and the judge will give it back to us so.

MARTIN. Haven't they got it on the map now and it cannot be altered. Didn't they warn me this day not to be going to law like a fool to be throwing my money into the sea.

MARY (*madly*). I would to God you had let me know, and I would have talked to them. You fool soft creature. (*She mocks him.*) With your "I suppose you're right, your honour." and "I suppose the map must be right, your honour," as ye done at the county court when Flanagan won the right of way against ye. Aye, and now he can be coming with the smile on his twisty face, knocking down the stones of the gaps would be in his road, on and past the very door here, down by the haggard and on to the turf, him and his sons and his asses and his carts. Whistling and shouting and laughing they'll be and you within feared to say one word—and them tramping and trespassing——

MARTIN. Who said I was for letting him ?

MARY. Och, don't I know ye ? Haven't I lived with you long enough now to know the kind of you. Did I ever see you stand up as a man and fight your rights. Never. With your "Father Nolan says this and we oughtn't to go agin his reverence," and "James Haverty wanted that and I would like to oblige him" (*almost crying with anger*)—and now there's my own land slipping from an under us.

MARTIN. Didn't I do and say all that I could ?

MARY (*more quietly*). D'ye remember when you come

over here to make the match? D'ye remember my father coming down with you and stretching out his hand and saying, "Show me the girl has a fortune of a bank of turf like that, Martin Burke. Stone turf, twice ten spits deep that would keep the hearth lit for a hundred years." D'ye remember that, Martin Burke? And where's my stone turf now and my hundred years' fire? Give away. Give away with your old soft hearted slinking ways. You haven't the guts to stand for your rights and fight for your wife and your children. (*With bitter mockery.*) "God bless your honour," and "Thank your honour for eaving us a bit." Did you think of me and my children, and them that's to come after us? Is it to the Flanagans now they'll be going in time to come begging for a scraw to keep the purtas boiling?

MARTIN (*despondently*). What could I be doing more?

MARY. No. Your like could be doing no more. Oh to God! that I had my father here, that never feared any man. D'ye think the Flanagans dare do the like on him? There never was any talk of these things till you came, and they saw the sort of a man you were.

MARTIN. Didn't the agent tell me himself this day that your father had less claim itself to that bog than the curlews would be flying over it.

MARY. And would you be letting the like of that talk be closing your mouth. Well, if you think so then, let them trample on ye. Let the Flanagans be pushing you in the gutter of a fair day and you with your gentleman's ways stepping aside and thanking of them.

MARTIN (*maddened*). Hold your accursed tongue. (*There is a sullen silence. Then the door swings open and young* MICHAEL FLANAGAN *appears without. He knocks and steps in jauntily.*)

YOUNG MICHAEL. Good day to you both. (*The Burkes do not answer.*) My father would be glad of a word with Martin, apart.

MARY. Can't he come himself and be speaking? Is it feared of the house of the Burkes he is?

YOUNG MICHAEL (*with a derisive smile*). It's not feared he is or myself either of any Burke that breathed. But he wanted to have a word with himself there apart.

(MARTIN *starts from his seat as if to go*, MARY BURKE *motions him back.*)

MARY. You'll go none out to speak till him, Martin Burke. Let him come himself and speak if he's wanting.

YOUNG MICHAEL. It was for a civil word I came here, Mrs. Burke. And it's because himself there isn't the bad man at heart that my father wanted him by himself and not you to be there raging the heart out of him with your flaming tinker's tongue. (*He steps out quickly and slams the door to after himself.*)

MARY. Aren't you the poor man to be sitting there and let him be speaking that way of your wife ?

MARTIN (*quietly*). I was thinking of Father Nolan, and what he was saying about disputes last Sunday from the Altar. And I for the station at Kilglass this night and my sins weighty on me. God help me. (*He seems to mutter a prayer and crosses himself devoutly.* MARY BURKE *looks at him curiously and makes as if to speak, then restrains herself. A silence.*) Let us not be making more bad blood between us this night and more sin.

MARY (*in an intense bitter voice*). It's no more I'll be saying this day. It's an end of talking I've made to your like, surely.

(*The sound of the child waking and crying in the room off.* MARY BURKE *rises and goes in.*)

MARTIN. God knows that if it's a good heart is in you, it's the bitter words is hiding it from me. (*The sound of the child crying.* MARY BURKE's *voice can be heard soothing it, and then she begins to sing softly.* MARTIN BURKE *rises and goes slowly to the door, opens it and looks out. He apparently sees some one coming and retreats back into the kitchen.* MICHAEL FLANAGAN *the elder, a big powerful man with a masterful strong face, appears in the doorway. He knocks, and then steps in.*)

FLANAGAN. I wanted to be talking to you, and without your wife. Is she out ?

MARTIN. She's within there with the child. What is it you're wanting of me ?

FLANAGAN. I want to talk straight till ye, Martin Burke. Is it to be the peace between us ? Speak out your mind and tell me.

MARTIN. Isn't it all one and the same to your kind now. You have got all ye wanted. What needs ye be seeking more.

FLANAGAN. It's a bit of a spread bank we'd be wanting, and they said we could ask you for it. You can give it or not as you please. Is it to be the civil word and obliging or black looks between us ? Say it out to me.

MARTIN. There'll be no civil word between us, Michael Flanagan. Is it coming on my own land that's left you are to spread your blasted turf ? Is it not content you are with trampling your right of way across my meadow land making gaps in my fences and cutting turf upon my banks, but you must be coming into my very house——

FLANAGAN. I come none into your house but to ask you a civil question. Is it to be peace or war between us ? And if it's to be war between us I'll make you sorrow for it.

MARTIN. Get you without the door.

FLANAGAN (*his temper rising*). Couldn't I break the little snap of a body you have between my two big wrists if ever you tongue me here or anywhere else ?

MARTIN (*coming closer*). You can take the word back with you, and tell your wife and your children, and all your connection is a black scourge on the land, that it's war—aye, and bloody war it'll be—between us. So let you be feared of me from this day out.

FLANAGAN. Afeard of you, is it ? (*He laughs grimly.*) No, not if all the dykes were full of Burkes on a dark night and them with red murder in their hands would I be feared. So lay to when and where you may, I care not that for ye. (*He snaps his fingers contemptuously.*) I have the right of you and the law of you and what's more, I

and my sons are going down to start the facing of our bank this day. So take ease and comfort to your mind with that. (*He turns to go.*) Come out and shout and curse, you and your wife, with her foul mouth on her. (*He slams the door to and goes away.*) (MARTIN BURKE *stands trembling with anger in the kitchen. His eyes light on the gun, and he stares as if fascinated, moves towards it slowly, and then suddenly grips it in his hands.* MARY BURKE *opens the door of the inner room and stands staring aghast at him.*)

MARY. For the love of God, Martin Burke, put down that thing.

MARTIN. Where got ye this ?

MARY. John Heffernan left it in. He was feared of the gauger and the police looking the licence. Have a care, man, its loaded.

MARTIN (*with a grim smile*). It's a great weapon, surely. It would kill or scare d'ye think ? Eh, woman ?

MARY. Put it down, Martin Burke, for the love of God. It's no way to be handling a gun the way you are.

MARTIN. You heard him with me ?

MARY. It was Mike Flanagan ?

MARTIN. Aye. Wouldn't you know the big voice of him. He would break me is it ? Across his two wrists ? (*He examines the cap.*)

MARY. For the love of God would you leave it down. Leave it down and go in and look at the child sleeping. It would take the badness from your mind the same as it did with me.

MARTIN (*grimly*). D'ye think it ? D'ye think is the badness away from ye ? What about the morrow when we'd be rising to see the Flanagans cutting on your great stone bank and trampling your father's meadows. Eh, woman ? I know ye. You'll be coming to me with your bitter, biting tongue and your scalding words and what your father would have done. And them without there raising a banter of hell. This night the Flanagans will fear me. This night you'll fear me. You'll fear

to sleep the same bed with me and my gallows rope round my neck. (*The sound of horses and carts without and the shouts of the Flanagans.*) Aye, they're coming surely, d'ye hear them ? Faith and I'll make them have a dread of my land as a fiery flame the like no Flanagan will so much as put his hand across a mearing, fearing it blast and wither him. (*Madly.*) I'll teach him and his breed to keep his bounds this side of damnation for ever. (*He makes toward the door.*)

MARY (*clutching hold of him*). Martin ! Martin ! Let them be. For the love of God——

MARTIN. Hold off me. (*He throws her roughly aside, pulls the door wide open and shouts.*) Let you all be feared of me now, Mike Flanagan. (*There is a derisive shout in answer.*)

MARY (*struggling with him again*). Ah, for the love of Almighty God, Martin Burke, is it the gallows you'd be making me a widow with. (*He breaks her grasp with brutal strength, and throwing her inside the kitchen slams the door to.*)

MARTIN (*without*). D'ye come off that bank, Mike Flanagan, before I blow your soul to hell.

(*There is a laugh, then the report of a gun. A cry of horror from the younger Flanagan.*)

MARY BURKE *falls senseless towards the door. The child in the room off, awakened, begins to cry softly. There is no other sound.*

CURTAIN.

THE TROTH

CHARACTERS

EBENEZER MCKIE, *A farmer.*

MRS. MCKIE, *His Wife.*

FRANCIS MOORE, *A neighbour.*

JOHN SMITH, *A labourer in McKie's employ.*

The action takes place in the kitchen of Ebenezer McKie.

TIME . . *The middle of the nineteenth century.*

THE TROTH

SCENE.—*The farm kitchen of* EBENEZER MCKIE. *There is a door at back and a window. To the left is a large, open fireplace, and to the right is a door leading to the bedroom. The kitchen is very scantily furnished and bare. There is a table at the back under the window, and a chair at each side. It is near midnight, and a candle placed on the mantel at the fireplace casts a dim light. An old muzzle-loading gun can be seen hung over the mantel. Outside the house is darkness, and a wind moans loudly as the curtain rises to discover* MRS. MCKIE *crouched over the fire.* JOHN SMITH *sits a little way off chafing his hands.* MRS. MCKIE *is a woman of some thirty-five years of age, neatly dressed, but poverty-stricken in appearance.* JOHN SMITH *is some five years her junior, and a stout, brawny type of labourer.*

MRS. MCKIE (*shivering*). Bless me but that's the cold night. The fire's near out, John. You're a bad hand at keeping up a fire.

SMITH. No wonder, and nothing to keep it going.

MRS. MCKIE. Get a lump more turf then.

SMITH. I was out just a wheen of minutes ago and there's no more turf about the place, ma'am. I could cut a lot of sticks if you like.

MRS. MCKIE. Na. We'll need them all for the morning. Deary me, there's not as much heat as would keep a tin of water at the boil. (*She shivers.*) Was it freezing hard ?

SMITH. Aye, hard it is, ma'am. You'd hear your neb

cracking if you put it round the corner of the door. (*A wind wails mournfully around the house.*)

Mrs. McKie. D'ye hear the wee bit of a cold wind singing? It's coming in off the old grey sea, and it would cut you to the bone. (*Wistfully.*) D'ye think the dead be cold, John?

Smith (*startled*). What? Sure they've neither heat nor cold. It's all one to them. (*Looking at her curiously.*) You're talking strange, ma'am.

Mrs. McKie. Aye. And whiles when I be thinking of my wee boy lying his lone in the old graveyard beyont, I be wishing I was near to hap him.

Smith (*consolingly*). It was a sore loss to you, ma'am. But maybe he's better where he is.

Mrs. McKie. He was a bonnie wee boy. My poor wee son.

Smith. Cheer up, ma'am. There's no way like being right and hearty, and there's nothing to beat arguing to lift you out of yourself. If you like I'll argue politics with you.

Mrs. McKie. No. I've no head for them things at all. But 'deed now, John, I hear you're a terrible old Tory.

Smith. I am, indeed, and right proud I am of it too. And if I had it I'd send every pound I owned to turning all the people Tory.

Mrs. McKie (*absently*). I wonder will Ebenezer's sister send us that money?

Smith. Was it money the master went to fetch the night at Ballyhanlon, ma'am?

Mrs. McKie. It was. (*Suspiciously.*) Who told you?

Smith (*carelessly*). Nobody told me. I was expecting that's what he went for. Is the master's sister a well-doing woman, ma'am? I heard she was.

Mrs. McKie. If Ebenezer had treated her a wee bit more decent at the time the old McKie, their father, was buried, he might have had more chance of getting

some from her the now. But I'm feared, John. (*Whispering.*) He kept fifty pounds off her that was hers by right.

SMITH. Aye?

MRS. MCKIE. Whist. Don't be telling anyone about it. He had intended to pay it, but what with the bad harvests this two years and one thing and another I'm feared it's all gone. Ah, John, but this is the terrible time of trouble. I suppose you heard they're starting the evicting to-morrow?

SMITH. Aye. D'ye know what I say is at the bottom of all this serving of writs and evicting on the estate, ma'am?

MRS. MCKIE. Ach, what could it be but the bad harvests this two years, and that hard old niggard of a landlord.

SMITH. Aye. Niggard or no niggard, he wouldn't have done a ha'pworth only for them Moores and Maguires and Maginnesses, and that connection, talking and threatening what they'd do on him if he wouldn't let them off the rent this winter. (*Emphatically.* Old Colonel Fotheringham's one of the right sort, and don't you be forgetting it, ma'am.

MRS. MCKIE (*contemptuously*). Ach. You're always backing up the quality. D'ye not know that every tenant on the estate, barring one or two, couldn't pay up, and they're every one of them noticed, there's no odds. And I heard the bailiffs were for Moore's first, poor creature, and be here the next. Och anee, John Smith, we'll be wandering the wide world the morrow. (*She breaks down and cries silently.*)

SMITH (*softening*). Cheer up, ma'am. D'ye think the master's sister would let the old place go and her rolling in money? Man a dear, it'll be lying ready for him the night in Ballyhanlon, don't you be a bit afeard. (*More or less to himself.*) It's the price of Moore and that lot raising all the bad talk against the landlord. Heth the evicting will soon settle them.

MRS. MCKIE (*hopelessly*). It'll settle more than them, John, I'm thinking.

SMITH. Did you say the bailiffs were for Francey Moore's ?

MRS. MCKIE. Deed are they, John. And him and his poor wee bit of a wife ailing. God preserve us! I heard they hadn't tasted anything but the Indian meal this six weeks, and her dying of the black fever.

SMITH. Aye. It's a pity of Moore in some ways too. But he shouldn't have talked the way he done.

MRS. MCKIE. A pretty wee girl she was, the same Mary Moore, with her black hair and her bonnie blue eyes. They say there's no chance of her coming round.

SMITH. Aye. I believe he's running about half out of his mind about her. (*He starts.*) I thought I heard somebody in the road outside. (*He goes toward the window and looks out.*) Aye. It's him you were talking about—Francey Moore. (*Knocking at the door.*)

MRS. MCKIE. Poor soul! Let him in, John. (SMITH *opens the door and* MOORE *enters. He is a nervous-looking man, with unkempt hair, black beard and wild dark eyes.*)

SMITH (*morosely*). How're you ?

MOORE. Good evening. (*He seems benumbed with cold, and stands awkwardly near the door.*)

MRS. MCKIE. Come here, Francey, and warm yourself. You'll be starved with cold that night.

MOORE. It's terrible cold. (*He seats himself to the left of the table apparently unmindful of her invitation.* SMITH *stands near the door to the right eyeing him disapprovingly.*)

SMITH. How's it with you down there ?

MOORE (*with an effort to keep back the agony that shows in his voice.*) Ah, my God. I couldn't stay in the house. The priest is in, and she's dying. It's only a matter of minutes now. (*After a pause.*) I thought I'd have catched McKie in.

MRS. MCKIE. He's down at Ballyhanlon the night to see about a bit of money to help to pay the rent. It's the hard and terrible times, Francey.

Moore. I wouldn't mind it only for the wife, and it's killing her. Aye. *He* killed her.

Smith. She might have a chance yet, man. I heard that.

Moore. She—she's dying. I heard the death rattling in her throat, and I couldn't stand it, I couldn't bear it any longer. I came out of the house. I watched my two sons dying, gasping, fighting for air. I canna watch my wife.

Smith (*listening*). There's the master's step. (McKie *opens the door and enters. He is a middle aged man of some forty years and more, of powerful build, but gaunt with privation. He is weary and haggard-looking, and takes but little interest in the people in his kitchen. He throws his overcoat over a chair, and then goes and sits down to the left at the table almost opposite* Moore, *and lets his head fall listlessly on his hands.*)

Mrs. McKie (*watching her husband intently, and speaking with suppressed excitement*). Had you any luck? Was it no there?

McKie. There was nothing. Not a line nor a scrap. (*Bitterly.*) My God, she might have forgiven me. She might have remembered the old place to no let it go to the strangers—the old home of the McKies. I told her in the letter I sent about remembering when we were children together under the same thatch roof, but she must have hardened her heart agin me. Three times I wrote her and she never ——

Smith. I bid you good night, sir. (*He goes to the door.*) Is there anything you'd be wanting in the morning?

McKie (*listlessly*). Nothing. Barring you give us a hand to carry out them chairs and things. You're paid up to to-night, aren't you?

Smith. Aye. You give it to me yesterday, all but ten shillings. But I can thole a bit. (*With a touch of malicious pride.*) I have got a job.

McKie. Aye?

Smith. Yes. I'm hiring with the gardener up at the

demesne. Good night. (*He goes out and is heard whistling blithely.*)

McKie (*raising his head, and then suddenly realising that* Moore *is s ated opposite him.*) Is that you. Francey ? I didn't notice you before.

Moore. It is.

McKie (*turning to his wife*). Not a line nor a scrap did she send. I met Michael Malone, Annie, and he gave me a wee drop—just a wee drop to keep out the cold. (*He brings a small bottle of whiskey out of his pocket. Then, suddenly turning to* Moore.) Who do you think I saw riding in with a policeman ahind him ?

Moore. The landlord.

McKie. Aye. Colonel Fotheringham himself. I heard he was going to the agent's, so I walked out after him and went there, for I thought to myself that maybe if I could get speaking to him it might turn him. But they ordered me out like a dog when they heard I'd no money with me.

Mrs. McKie. He's here himself, then ?

McKie. Aye. He's coming back again to the hall the night.

Moore (*eagerly.*) Late ? He'll be late coming ? He'll no be by yet ?

McKie. No. He'll no be by yet. Maybe you think if you catched him you could soften him to you. (*Bitterly.*) Pah ! Could you soften a stone ?

Moore (*intensely*). Maybe ——

McKie (*contemptuously*). Maybe ! Do you know what I heard ? The old widow Maguire of the whin head give him the black curse on her knees and him riding past. And he snappit his fingers at her and laughed.

Moore (*half to himself*). Them that gets the black curse dies that same night.

McKie (*looking in a wondering way at* Moore, *and then seeing his wife regarding the latter with fear in her eyes.*) Here. Get to bed, woman dear. You'll be perished with cold.

Mrs McKie (*rising obediently and going towards the bedroom door*). Deed aye. I'd be the better. Good night to you both and don't be long. I'm feared by myself in the dark.

McKie. We'll no be long. (Mrs. McKie *goes out.*) Here. Take a drop, Francey. (*He pours some of the whiskey into a cup.*) It'll hearten you. Your wife—is she any the better ?

Moore (*broken-heartedly*). May God rest her soul this night.

McKie. She be dying ?

Moore (*hopelessly*). Aye.

McKie. I'm sorry for you, Francey. I lost a wee boy of my own. I'm sorry for you.

Moore. God, but it's hard to loose house and home and wife and wains, and no ways for to beat it off. What are you for doing yourself ? Can you pay up ?

McKie. I canna.

Moore. They're for my place the morrow, and they're for redding you out next.

McKie. Redding me out ?

Moore. Aye. And then when you're gone the people will be coming and pointing to the place, and the stranger they put in will be coming out, and they'll ask him who it belonged till, and no one to tell them it was once the McKies that owed it. (*With increasing intensity.*) Two year ago you mind there was a bad harvest. We prayed to the landlord to be easy. He told us no. Why ? Why ? Because, I tell you, Ebenezer McKie, and I know. He had debts of his own—gambling debts—debts of honour as the quality calls them. Next year it was worse. No one got in the crops. They lay rotten in the fields. You and me and the rest went to him again. We might as well have been praying to them big stones up yonder on Slieve Dubh. (*With a sob in his voice.*) Then the sickness come and the wee childre—they slippit away one by one. One that was to be called after you, McKie of Ballyhanlon, and two of my own wee

childre—they went away by the dark boreens, and you couldn't call them back to you now. No—not if all the rents of the world was poured into your hand.

McKie (*tremulously*). Don't, man. Don't.

Moore (*his voice trembling with intense passion*). A pound or two might have saved them. Aye. Only a pound or two. And now they're lying rotten under the sod, but their wee souls is crying. You can hear them in the wind crying—crying to the God that made them for vengeance. (McKie *raises his head and looks in a startled way at* Moore.) Who owed the hand that took and wrenched the very food from their mouths? Who was it swore to the police sergeant—I'll learn them, says he, to obey me. I've a man for every place that knows how to labour the land, not a lot of lazy, drunken swine.

McKie (*with anger*). He said that?

Moore. I suppose, says he, for all their talking, they'll just go out with their tails between their legs like the lot of cowardly, snarling curs they are.

McKie (*passionately*). He called us that, did he?

Moore. Aye.

McKie (*wildly*). And by God, Mr. Colonel Fotheringham, there was a McKie put the fear of the Lord in your boasting breed in '98, and there's another one will do it again the night. (*He starts up and reaches for the gun, then suddenly suspicious of* Moore, *he stops and looks round at him.*)

Moore (*smiling grimly*). You're afeared of me? Wait till you see what I put behind the barrel at the door. (*He opens the door, reaches his hand out and brings in a gun.*)

McKie (*in an awed voice*). You mean to ——

Moore (*wildly*). Aye. I swore to do it this night, and I swore he would not escape. That's why I come to you. Listen. We can get him as he comes through the Glen. We can each take a side of the road. One side has a hedge with brambly land and the other across from it

is most whins with the demesne wall behind. It's the only two places you can get him from. But I warn you. Him that takes the whinny side runs a chance of the rope. Fair do. We'll toss for it. If you win, you can have the pick.

McKie. Afore I toss will you make me a promise. I want a promise off you, Francey Moore. We two have seen our wee children, as you say, slip by beyont us, and we have seen the brown earth shovelled over them the way you would bury a dog. They were buried the same day—my son and your own. Mine in the old meeting-house green and yours in the chapel graveyard, and you grippit my hand when I met you at the roads end, and you cried like a child. And I lay that same night at the same place we're going to to-night, but the hand of the Lord turned him back, and he came not by me. But I said to myself he should die. And the one thing I ask you to promise is this. If one's catched, he's no to tell tales on the other, and that other will look after his wife for him.

Moore. I promise you.

McKie. Swear it, man. Swear it.

Moore. I swear it by the Lord God in Heaven.

McKie (*taking a coin from his pocket and tossing it on the table*). Head or harp ?

Moore. Head. (*They both look at the coin.*) I've lost. I'll have to take to the whins.

McKie. It will be a hard job to escape from your place.

Moore. I'll chance it.

McKie. But mind what you swore.

Moore. You can trust me, and I can do the same with you. I want a cap off you for the gun. That's what I come for the night. (McKie *goes across to the mantel, takes down a small box and extracts a few caps from it. He leaves it on the table and hands some to* Moore.) He'll be here in a couple of minutes. Hurry.

McKie (*taking down the gun and going across near the*

door). I'll lock the door and take the key with me. If John Smith took a notion to come back, I'm feared he'd be for noticing the gun away. (*He follows* Moore *out through the door and locks it. A pause.*)

Mrs. McKie (*without*). Ebenezer! Ebenezer! (*She comes out into the kitchen.*) Ebenezer! He's away. I thought I might have given that poor creature Moore this half pound of tea I found in the drawer. (*She goes to the door and tries to open it.*) He's locked it! (*She shivers.*) It's cold. (*Uneasily.*) There's something queer about that Francey Moore. His eyes were flaming like that old cat of Mahaffy's looking at you in the darkness of the byre. He's next mad, that man, about his wife. She's not long for this world, I'm thinking. (*Knocking at the door.*) God have mercy. Who's that?

Smith (*without*). It's me, John Smith. (*He goes round to the window.*)

Mrs. McKie. Aye. You can look through the broke pane. What's the matter?

Smith. I thought I would have got Moore here. His wife died a wee while ago. I'm after hearing it at home from the neighbours.

Mrs. McKie. Well-a-well. She was a pretty wee girl in her time.

Smith. I thought I'd have met the master and Moore coming down, but there was no sight of them.

Mrs. McKie. The master —— (*She catches sight of the box of caps, lifts them, and then with quick suspicion, her eyes travel over to where the gun used to hang.*) Ah! God bless us!

Smith (*startled*). What ails you, ma'am?

Mrs. McKie (*trembling violently, but recovering herself*). It was a nail catched me. You'd be the better of your bed, I'm thinking. (*A shot rings out in the distance. A short pause. Then another.*)

Smith. D'ye hear yon? (*With a sudden suspicion in his voice.*) I say, ma'am.

Mrs. McKie. Well?

SMITH. Did the master go out with Moore next the Glen?

MRS. MCKIE. The master? He's no out of the house. He was cold and I was getting him a wee drop to warm him. (*She reaches for the bottle on the table.*)

SMITH. Her head's turned ——. (*A sound of shouting in the distance.*) What's yon?

MRS. MCKIE. What?

SMITH (*listening intently.*) Shouting or something down the Glen! (*More shouting.*) Boys, and it's where the shots went off too! (*Renewed noise.*) D'ye no hear it? There's something wrong. I must away to see what it is. (*He rushes away quickly.* MRS. MCKIE *listens until assured he is gone and, then, overcome, clutches at the table for support.*)

MRS. MCKIE. The landlord! He was to come up the Glen to-night. Oh, Lord God, preserve my husband, keep him from evil, save him from the shedding of blood. Save him, ah, God, my Saviour, save him! (*She kneels wildly at the table. A sound of soft footfalls outside makes her catch her breath and listen.* MCKIE *suddenly unlocks the door and appears. He goes lightly across the kitchen, hangs up the gun, and is just going through the bedroom door when his wife calls.*) Ebenezer! What have you been up to? What have you done? (*He remains silent.*) Where is Moore? What has he done? Ah, there was bad in the dark man. I seen it in his eye.

MCKIE. Sh. Get to your bed, woman.

MRS. MCKIE. I'm feared, Ebenezer, for John Smith was round, and he asked had you and Moore gone down by the Glen.

MCKIE. Ah, great God! And what did you say, woman? (*He rushes forward and grasps her almost fiercely by the hands.*)

MRS. MCKIE. I told him a lie. I said you were in your bed. Whist. (*A murmuring of voices can be heard.*) D'ye hear yon? (*The voices come nearer.*)

MCKIE. Canny with the light. (*He blows out the candle at the table.*)

MRS. MCKIE (*going to the window and looking out cautiously.*) Lord have mercy! They're carrying something up the road. (*She turns to her husband.*) Ebenezer! In the mercy of God, speak! Did you do it? (*Hysterically.*) Ah, for God's sake, did you?

MCKIE. Whist. (*Sound of footsteps.*) Here's someone. Dinna let them in.

SMITH (*hurriedly coming to the window and speaking in a hushed awed voice.*) God bless us! I never thought he was that mad!

MRS. MCKIE. What is it?

SMITH. Francey Moore's in the hands of the police yonder. He shot the landlord, old Colonel Fotheringham, dead in the Glen, and they catched him among the whins. He'll swing for it now. I suppose it was the wife dying turned his head. They are bringing him and the body up by the house here to the barracks. (*He goes away back again.*)

MRS. MCKIE (*in a voice of terror*). Ebenezer! Ebenezer! Was it you or him done it? (*The voices now come very near.*)

MCKIE (*standing where the darkness of the kitchen almost hides him.*) Hold your tongue, woman. Are they passed yet?

MRS. MCKIE (*looking out*). No yet. (*She turns to him with a gesture of horror.*) It was you. I can see it in your eye. You killed him.

MCKIE (*breathlessly*). Whist. Are they passed yet?

MRS. MCKIE (*as the sound of the voices dies away*). They're gone. (*She goes forward, looks into his eyes, and then involuntarily shrinks back.*) It was *you* that killed him.

MCKIE. Peace, woman. (*He stretches out his hands towards her appealingly. She makes no movement*). Moore has no wife.

(CURTAIN.)

THE DRONE

This Play was first produced at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, by the Ulster Literary Theatre, in April, 1908, with the following caste :—

John Murray	G. A. Charters
Daniel Murray	Arthur Malcolm
Mary Murray	Seveen Canmer
Kate	Maire Crothers
Sam Brown	Rutherford Mayne
Andrew McMinn	John Field
Sarah McMinn	Bridget O'Gorman
Alick McCready	Ross Canmer
Donal Mackenzie	Robert Henry

THE TURN OF THE ROAD

This Play was first produced in Belfast, December, 1906, by the Ulster Literary Theatre

RED TURF

This Play was first produced by the Ulster Literary Theatre in December, 1911, with the following caste :—

Martin Burke	JOSEPH CAMPBELL
Mary Burke	JOSEPHINE MAYNE
John Heffernan	J. M. HARDING
Michael Flanagan, the elder . .	ROSS CANMER
Michael Flanagan, the younger .	C. K. AYRE

THE TROTH

This Play was first produced at the Crown Theatre, Peckham, London, by Mr. William Mollison's Company, in October, 1908, with the following caste :—

Ebenezer McKie	W. A. Mackeray
Mrs. McKie	Josephine Woodward
Francis Moore	Whitford Kane
John Smith	Murray Graham

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